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Scientific Society

A scientific society can be stable given certain conditions. The first of these is a single government of the whole world, possessing a monopoly of armed forces and therefore able to enforce peace. The second condition is a general diffusion of prosperity, so that there is no occasion for envy of one part of the world by another. The third condition is a low birth rate everywhere so that the population of the world becomes stationary or nearly so. The fourth condition is the provision for individual initiative both in work and play, and the greatest diffusion of power compatible with maintaining the necessary political and economic framework.

The world is a long way from realizing these conditions, and therefore we must expect vast upheavals and appalling suffering before stability is attained. But while upheavals and suffering have hitherto been the lot of man, we can now see, however dimly and uncertainly, a possible future culmination in which poverty and war will have been overcome, and fear; where it survives, will have become pathological. The road, I fear, is long, but that is no reason for losing sight of the ultimate hope.

- Bertrand Russell



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MOTHER TERESA: THE BLESSED

In our country sainthood is bestowed upon saintly men and women by their followers and others not because of their miracles but because of their compassion and saintly behavior; because of their philosophy of life that they themselves live. In earlier centuries, the Catholic Church too, might have gathered at the funeral of Mother Teresa to declare her a saint. Now, however, achieving sainthood is more complicated and not without the politics and other human imperfections involved in it, even though this 'Saint of the Gutter' is said to be above all politics.

It will be interesting to learn a bit about this formal process of canonization to understand why it is so time consuming. The Catholic Church thinks in centuries and tests whether the enthusiasm of the day lasts. This the computer dependent citizens of the 20th and the 21st centuries just do not understand. May be this is why Pope John Paul II had to hasten the process in case of Mother Teresa.

Pope John XV developed an official canonization procedure in the 10th century, which was revised time and again during the last thousand years. According to this procedure, the process of canonization should begin 5 years after the death of the candidate. Pope John Paul II waved this requirement in case of Mother Teresa and started it within a year of her demise. The Vatican then sets up an inquiry committee called ***advocatus diaboli (devil's advocate)*** to test the veracity of claims made on behalf of the candidate. The present Pope abolished this office altogether in order to create instant saints to match the spirit of the day. Thus, Mother Teresa was nominated for canonization in less than a year bending the rules and abolishing the office.

After nomination, local bishops investigate the life of the candidate and send their findings to the Vatican. The panel of theologians and cardinals then sits together and gives approval. The Pope then proclaims the candidate venerable, meaning a role model of Catholic Virtues. Next the Church determines beatification of the candidate if it is proved that he or she is responsible for a miracle that took place after her/his death. In case of Mother Teresa, the Pope decreed approval of a miracle required for beatification and called her a 'world emblem of Christian charity' who enjoyed 'solid worldwide fame of sanctity. Finally for the designation of Saint, the Church must certify proof of a second posthumous miracle. Of these miracles there are a plenty, since the Vatican does not consider any medical opinion relevant in this context. In the first miracle Monica Besra had a picture of the Mother in her house from which a beam of light emerged to cure her cancerous tumor. The opinion of the doctor who treated Mrs. Monica Besra of West Bengal, who became famous in the first miracle, was completely ignored. And so was the opinion of her husband who does not believe in it. Not surprisingly Besra's medial reports are missing and rumors have it that sister Beta took them away and both she and sister Nirmala refuse to comment upon it. Other miracles to list a few are:

- In the United States, a French woman broke her ribs in an accident. She was cured after wearing a locket with Mother Teresa's image.
- A Palestinian girl is said to have been healed after Mother appeared in her dreams.

All this may sound like cock and bull stories to rational people. Even the blessed Mother had moments of doubts and despair about which, it is said, she wrote to her spiritual guides. Christopher Hitchens, a columnist who writes in the ***Nation*** and the ***Vanity Fair***, debunks many of these myths in the documentary in 1994 ***Hell's Angel***. Some details about this appear in a book entitled, ***The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in theory and Practice*** (1995). Malcolm Muggeridge started glorification of Mother Teresa with his tacit claim of her miracle in his 1969 BBC documentary, ***'Something Beautiful for God'***. He claims that the ***Home for the Dying*** run by the mother was very dimly lit and was impossible to film. Yet he did do some filming there but also took some shots

out side in the daylight. However to his surprise, 'the part taken inside was bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light whereas the part taken outside was rather dim and confused!' And he was convinced that this was because of the "Kindly Light"! However cameraman Ken Macmillan chooses to give 'three cheers for the new Kodak film'. The rumor of the miracle did spread far and wide and Malcolm and Ken were made the witnesses of the miracle.

The Pope's haste in all this process smacks of politics. His admirers are proud that he is not politically conservative. He is said to be 'the only man in the world to have admirers across the global political spectrum, from Bush to Fidel Castro, from Tariq Aziz to Shimon Perez. He condemned anti-Semitism openly and recognized 'Israel'. Can all this be an attempt to get an access into the infidel's den? Or does the pontiff have one eye on history? He also is supposed to have taken a moderate view of science and technology. That he surely does and so did the saintly Mother as far as their own heath and comforts are concerned! The Pope worn down by Parkinson's disease takes all the costliest medicines made available by modern science and is attended by doctors steeped in modern medical science. He does not seem to rely entirely on the Mother's miraculous powers. The Mother herself did not hesitate to be treated in the best medical institutes. In her case, a tumor had to be removed in 1992, a dislocated shoulder had to be fixed in 1993, a broken femur bone had to be repaired in 1994 and an appendix removed in 1996. She was hospitalized off and on in very posh hospitals and received the best available treatment.

Hitchens in his book quoted earlier avoids indulging in Catholic bashing but points out many drawbacks of the philosophy and practice of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. He outlines the way in which the Mother has been more of a friend to the powerful and greedy than to the powerless and needy. She befriended dictators to get hefty donations from them. Her good work has always been placed second to her work as a missionary. Her clinics are shoddy and run in the name of a cult of redemptive suffering. The Ethos of the Mother's base of operation is 'Providence Over Planning'. There are few medically trained personnel making decisions and no guideline to help the untrained to distinguish curable from incurable conditions, all because the Mother wants the sisters to remain on equal terms with the poor. There are no strong analgesics for management of pain the Mother does not believe in reducing the pain of inmates as God himself ordains the suffering. But the wretched patients think about their pain is related in an anecdote about the Mother. The Mother while pacifying a patient suffering from excruciating pain told him to bear it patiently as the pain occurs as Jesus kisses him. The poor patient then tells Mother, 'In that case Mother, please pray and ask him to stop kissing me!' Thus Mother Teresa's missionary order fails to protect the health of its patients deliberately in the name of its ideology. The mission indulged in deathbed conversions to Catholicism. Children from posh schools were made to collect and donate to her mission in a spurt of competitive charity.

All secularists should ponder over the haste and eagerness of the Vatican to elevate the Mother to sainthood. All of us were enamored of this white, Slavic nun who preferred the life of the gutters to the life of European comforts, in order to nurse the children of a lesser god. However the post-haste beatification of the mother seems motivated. Jesus Christ's faith healing established the legacy of miracle-cures because medical science was not developed at all then. But the reliability of miracle-cures declined with the progress in medical science along with other sciences. That the so-called progressive Pope still insists on performing and proving miracles in the 21st Century sounds anomalous. She has also won the Nobel Peace Prize. Those who nominated her were three controversial American conservative senators Pete Dominic, Mark O Hatfield, and Hubert Humphrey. John Paul II has completed 25 years of his papacy. This he celebrated with all pomp and show and to mark the occasion he wants to push the

catholic road map. Balbir Punj in his article, 'Beatification Boom' in Times of India, says, '...he is one of the most political Popes ever. He helped bring about the end of communism in his native Poland. His predecessor Paul VI, who had begun to modernize and decentralize the Church appointed only 26 new Cardinals in his 15 years tenure. John Paul II appointed 226 new cardinals during his 25 years. On the day of the beatification he appointed 31 others, all carefully chosen conservatives, to further the Church's agenda. His mission as distinctly pronounced in Nov.'99, in New Delhi - the Evangelization of Asia in the Third Millennium, on the lines of Europe in the first and America in the second. The Beatification of Mother Teresa is a step in that direction.'

The real achievement of the Mother, which even the rationalists would not grudge her is that she allowed the ignorance, poverty, disease and utter hopelessness that swirled around us to actually touch the insulated and sanitized lives of our upper middle class homes. She brought us face to face with the embarrassing reality of our country. We should recognize Mother Teresa is a remarkable but a real human being and not be infatuated with her being blessed and with her power of performing miracles. Prabir Ghosh, Head of Science and Rationalist Association of India, insists that Mother Teresa's miracles should be scrutinized thoroughly. He has offered to turn over the Rs. 2 million funds with his association to the Catholic Organization if they prove a miracle. But other rationalists, who raised a hue and cry against the indigenous miracle when our beloved *Ganapatis* started drinking milk from the hands of the devotees, seem to have chosen to keep mum regarding the miracle-mongering in the name of Mother Teresa. It is worthwhile to note here that the Mother did not perform any miracle while she was alive.

Lastly, let us see how Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity Order founded 52 years ago compares with a similar secular order founded by Baba Amte, a little later, called Anand Van (that has become Eden on earth for the most despised lepers of India). The Mother embraced and espoused the downtrodden of Kolkata not for alleviating their wretched condition but as a means of emancipation and of reaching Christ. Baba Amte and all the members of his family on the contrary had no God to reach out to but worked with the lepers and made them conscious of their worth as human beings, who in their turn created a heaven for themselves on this earth- the Anand Van.

Suman Oak

HOLY SAINTS: ONE FOR EVERY OCCASION!

There are good reasons why St Caedwalla's statues aren't flying off the shelves at the Bandra fair. The seventh century king wandered Europe, bumping off opponents and grabbing power, but one thing he could not be faulted for was his timing. He repented 10 days before his death, ascended the ranks of heaven and today enjoys a small but exclusive constituency – as patron saint of serial killers!

The colourful St Caedwalla is just one of a disembodied platoon who will be recalled by pious Catholics on every first November. For all Saint's Day is dedicated to more than 10000 souls canonized over the centuries. There's St Blandina, who helps those falsely, accused of cannibalism and Bartholomew the Apostle, who aids twitchers. Others perform worthy functions like protecting against caterpillars and in-law problems.

Every year these celebrated martyrs get more company. Even in this disbelieving age, the church continues to create new posts – and everybody from Belgian airhostesses in Argentine diplomats, cabbies to AIDS care - givers, are granted special protectors. Angel Gabriel, who informed Mary about her special child, is patron saint of the radio postal workers. Bernadine of Sienna, silver – tongued preacher, oversees the public relations profession. St Francis of Assisi, who loved nature, is the patron saint of ecologists.

But how are these 'beats' assigned? The Pope and popular opinion play a part, as do tales of the saints themselves. At the moment an on-line poll is under way for patron saint for the Internet – complete with slander campaigns and aggressive electioneering! While patron saints multiply - and embrace arm dealers, apologists and bicyclists – the old –timers remain favorites. People turn to St Anthony when they lose things, and to St Jude when desperate. Before starting on long journeys, people buy stickers of St Christopher.

Courtesy: TOI News

HOW TO BECOME A SAINT?

The week of Mother Teresa's death, Newsweek published the Catholic Almanac's steps to becoming a saint. If you are thinking of giving it a try, do remember that not only do you have to perform miracles; you have to do so after you are dead.

Informal Phase: A local group promotes devotion to the deceased.

Investigative Phase: The local bishop appoints officials to collect writings by and about the candidate. They hold tribunals in which witnesses for and against the cause give testimony. The Vatican checks its archives for anything that would prevent the cause from processing.

Evaluation and Judgment Phase: Local bishops send testimony and other material to the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Sainthood. A relator who oversees the writing of a biography is appointed. Eight theologians and the promoter of the faith judge the cause. If it's approved, cardinals and bishops of the congregation vote. If the pope approves, the candidate is declared "Venerable".

The Miracle Process Phase: A candidate must have a miracle credited to his or her intercession. Only miracles, those occur after the candidate's death count. The evidence is judged by medical experts and then judged by a panel of theologians.

Beatification Phase: Once the cardinals and the pope approve the miracle process, the pope beatifies the candidate.

Canonization Phase: Before a candidate can be canonized, one more miracle is required. The miracle must have occurred after beatification. Then the pope canonizes the saint.

Sometimes this process can take a long time. Joan of Arc, for example, was burned at the stake in 1431 and was not canonized until 1920. So you also have to be patient.

Courtesy: Skeptic

INDIA HAS NO REASON TO BE GRATEFUL TO MOTHER TERESA

India, especially Kolkata, is seen as the main beneficiary of Mother Teresa's legendary 'good work' for the poor that made her the most famous Catholic of our times, a Nobel Peace Prize Winner. Evaluating what she had actually done here, I think, India has no reason to be grateful to her.

Mother Teresa has given a bad name to Kolkata, painting the beautiful, interesting, lively and culturally rich Indian metropolis in the colors of dirt, misery, hopelessness and death. Styled into the big gutter, it became the famous backdrop for her very special charitable work. Her order is only one among more than 200 charitable organizations, which try to help the slum-dwellers of Calcutta to build a better future. It is locally not very visible or active. But tall claims like the absolutely baseless story of her slum school

for 5000 children have brought enormous international publicity to her institutions, and enormous donations!

Mother Teresa has collected many, many millions (some say: billions) of Dollars in the name of India's paupers (and many, many more in the name of paupers in the other "gutters" of the world). Where did all this money go? It is surely not used to improve the lot of those, for whom it was meant. The nuns would hand out some bowls of soup to them and offer shelter and care to some of the sick and suffering. The richest order in the world is not very generous, as it wants to teach them the charm of poverty. "The suffering of the poor is something very beautiful and the world is being very much helped by the nobility of this example of misery and suffering," said Mother Teresa. Do we have to be grateful for this lecture of an eccentric billionaire?

The legend of her Homes for the Dying has moved the world to tears. Reality, however, is scandalous: In the overcrowded and primitive little homes, many patients have to share a bed with others. Though there are many suffering from tuberculosis, AIDS and other highly infectious illnesses, hygiene is no concern. The patients are treated with good words and insufficient (sometimes outdated) medicines, applied with old needles, washed in lukewarm water. One can hear the screams of people having maggots tweeze red from their open wounds without pain relief. On principle, strong painkillers are even in hard cases not given. According to Mother Teresa's bizarre philosophy, it is "the most beautiful gift for a person that he can participate in the sufferings of Christ". Once she tried to comfort a screaming sufferer: "You are suffering, that means Jesus is kissing you!" The man got furious and screamed back: "Then tell your

When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize, she used the opportunity of her worldwide telecast speech in Oslo to declare abortion the greatest evil in the world and to launch a fiery call against population control. Her charitable work, she admitted, was only part of her big fight against abortion and population control. This fundamentalist position is a slap in the face of India and other Third World Countries, where population control is one of the main keys for development and progress and social transformation. Do we have to be grateful to Mother Teresa for leading this worldwide propagandist fight against us with the money she collected in our name?

Mother Teresa did not serve the poor in Kolkata, she served the rich in the West. She helped them to overcome their bad conscience by taking billions of Dollars from them. Some of her donors were dictators and criminals, who tried to white wash their dirty vests. Mother Teresa revered them for a price. Most of her supporters, however, were honest people with good intentions and a warm heart, who fall for the illusion that the "Saint of the Gutter" was there to wipe away all tears and end all misery and undo all injustice in the world. Those in love with an illusion often refuse to see reality.

Sanal Edamaruku

VIGYAN BODH VAHINI IN LATUR DISTRICT

ANS has recently undertaken a statewide program to reach most of the villages through its 'Science Class on Wheels'. As a part of this program, Science Demonstration Vehicle reached 150 schools in Latur district. While eradicating the prevalent superstitions and bringing awareness of scientific temperament, ANS activists often experience that there is still lot of work needs to be done since most people are still under the iron grip of rituals and traditions. Probably this may be due innate fear of something bad may happen if one does not follow the age-old traditions. In addition to this fear, modern technology has bestowed latest tools to fraudulent Godmen to exploit systematically the gullible. They are using the modern management techniques and public relation methods to fulfill their vested interests. Under the pretext of promise of

spiritual satisfaction, Godmen, *Buas* and *Matajis* are becoming stumbling block during the efforts put up by ANS. The age-old mindset is numbing the common sense and intellectual power of the victims of spiritual blackmailing. As a result there is a strong opposition from every nook and corner for bringing the desired change in the society.

Proper education would have made the difference in the society and lead them on the path of reformation to achieve the scientific and skeptical attitude. In fact the constitution stipulates adoption of scientific temperament in all walks of public and private life. But the formal education had failed to bring the desired change in the society. Unless the rational values are not imbibed right from the childhood, it will be a colossal task to change the mind set in later years.

Keeping this in view, ANS had evolved a program with the financial assistance from Department of Science & Technology of Government of India to reach the schools and demonstrate them the truth behind the miracles and importance of scientific attitude in one's life. The program has been aimed to bring awareness that there is no external agency or super natural power to offer the readymade solutions to the issues faced by everyone. It is the individual's efforts that will bring the desired change.

During this program, the students were told about the scientific attitude and everyday science through the simple tests and experiments. Science is a logical thought process, which does not depend upon the scriptures or upon the words of saints. Sometimes our senses, through which we acquire knowledge, fall prey to delusions. ANS activists demonstrated these aspects with active participation of enthusiastic students. Students got convinced that Ghost haunting is also a sort of hallucination. The miracle demonstration by ANS activists was a prime attraction among students. Balancing question mark like metal piece on the tip of the finger was a miracle as far as students were concerned until the principle of center of gravity was explained to them through demo. A fountain from a bottle, melodious music from ordinary pipe, tests explaining principle of action and reaction, etc were most popular demos which students enjoyed very much. A monk floating in the air, fire walking, sleeping on a plank fitted with more than 500 sharp nails, putting similar plank on the stomach and 80 kg man on the plank, fire on the water surface, piercing a sharp nail through the tongue, escaping from tightly bound iron chains and shackles, etc were the other demonstrations performed by the activists to explain various scientific principles. In fact, students were wonder-struck to witness such demonstrations, which were usually performed by the so-called possessors of miraculous powers. ANS activists stressed that no one can go against the natural laws and as such no one has the miraculous powers. Once the principles were explained to students, the incidents became ordinary events and thereby students would not believe the tricksters.

ANS activists found that there were lots of misconceptions about the snakes. People are still having very rudimentary knowledge about snakes and mostly of them were afraid of snakes. ANS activists explained all about snakes by actual demonstration of live snakes. During the lecture students were told how to identify poisonous and non-poisonous snakes, preliminary treatment for snakebites etc. The demo probably might have made students bit bold enough not to kill the snakes, since snakes are friends of farmers.

During the program a documentary film 'Why' that shed light on the rituals, traditions astrology, fatalism etc, was shown. A lecture was also given on the biological changes during adolescence with the help of slide shows and posters. The lecture was more beneficial to girl students who had misconceptions about sexual development. During question and answer hours students were asking many questions on evolution, birth of the universe, sun, moon, stars, etc. The lab had posters on these subjects, which satisfied their thirst of knowledge.

The total program was of around four hours and it was found that students were engrossed in the demo. Sometimes they used to skip their meals while watching the

program. There was tremendous response from students, teachers and parents wherever the vehicle had gone. The vehicle was fully equipped with slide and video projectors, posters, science demo kit, snake boxes, etc. The vehicle was taken from place to place and used to reach the schools on dot without wasting time. More than 150 schools of 10 Talukas of Latur district arranged demo during which, more than 75000 students were benefited. ANS has planned to arrange such programs in other part of Maharashtra too.

Madhav Bavage

FENG SHUI: CHALLENGE TO VASTUSHAstra

These days, things like idols of smiling Buddha, a pair of Chinese ducks, dragon-headed tortoise, three legged frog, a phoenix, a string of coins in Chinese script, a fish tank, etc., are seen to decorate our drawing rooms. One may think it to be a sign of rich taste and high standard of interior decoration. But it is not. These things are part of Feng Shui. Moreover they are cheap and easily available in the domestic utilities shops. Earlier, drawing rooms used to have Gandhiji's three monkeys. Three Chinese men with thin drooping beards and mustaches have now replaced them. An embroidered geometric figure of entangled squares and a crystal sphere hang in the hall. The marble tortoises seen at the entrance of a temple have metamorphosed into brass ones and entered the drawing room. In short our house is transformed into Feng Shui. And why not? Have we not readily accepted Chinese toys and other cheap Chinese products under the pressures of globalization? Don't think that we Indians alone believe in these irrational things. These things are ubiquitous. Wherever human beings live, Feng Shui is bound to reach.

What is Feng Shui?

People have all sorts of misgivings regarding it, thinking it to be a person or a religion or sect. Feng Shui, in fact, is the ancient science of Chinese architecture. It literally means air and water. The Feng Shui experts claim that the 5 thousand years old architectural science is an alternative to the modern architecture. It works by balancing the energy of the house or the edifice. It adjusts the effect of energy in the edifice using different things in order to make it favorable to us. Like a farmer, the Feng Shui expert cultivates the energy of the edifice and harvests prosperity for its occupant.

According to Feng Shui, there are two fundamental forces, male and female, called "Yin" and "Yang", that unite to produce the energy "Chi". This is similar to our notion of 'Pran'. This forms the basis of Feng Shui. It borrows from Chinese astrology and takes into consideration luck and destiny as well as inner motivation. It is highly idiosyncratic and individually tailored and there is not a single concept or object of Feng Shui that can be applied equally to all people.

Let us try to understand why Feng Shui became so popular so quickly. Why did Chinese food become popular? Have we tried and exhausted all the Indian recipes? We used to deride Chinese food as cockroach pickle, stuffed snake, fried frog legs, etc., but it entered our country in an altogether different form that was able to capture the gastronomy of the gluttons here. Tastes are not acquired instantly; they develop gradually. Beer that tastes like cow's urine is eventually relished like nectar. If one fails to relish it, the dread of being branded as unsophisticated hangs over us. Of course one's taste too changes over time. In the same way, Chinese food that is loathed initially eventually makes your mouth water, giving rise to any number of Chinese restaurants. The case of Feng Shui is not any different.

Vastushastra is Indian Feng Shui

How could Feng Shui displace our Vastushastra? Some patriots are quite disturbed by this development. They maintain that our Vastushastra is as ancient as the Chinese one. They seem to equate being ancient with being bona fide. The older the wine the more precious it becomes. Authenticity seems to increase with antiquity. Flaunting modernity and pride in the antiquity of heritage both ensue from egotism. The remnants at Mohenjodaro and Harappa are structural specimens of a fine civilization. Our patriots want to flaunt this as our progress even in those ancient days. They conveniently forget that the Chinese, the Babylonian, the Egyptian, and the Greek civilizations too flourished at the same time. The point here is not what is more ancient but what is more useful.

No one would deny that our Vastushastra is very ancient. Then why is it being discussed only since a decade? The credit goes to modern marketing management techniques. They examine not just the marketing but also the clients' culture, psychology, social concerns, etc., and then use modern techniques appropriately instead of traditional marketing practices. You don't need a Vastushastra expert to tell you that one cannot be cheerful in a stuffy, ill-ventilated dwelling. Fresh air and light bring tranquility to the house. Once this relationship between the structure of a house and the mindset of its residents is established, Vastu's connection with concepts like auspicious/inauspicious, success/failure, health/disease, prosperity, etc., is easily accepted. One is prone to blame defective Vastu as the cause of failure and calamity in our lives? Is it possible to overcome them by making appropriate changes in the Vastu structure? If it is, then why shouldn't I do it? Vastushastra's success lies in this way of thinking. In addition it now has acquired prestige in elite society. Earlier, in our society a drunkard even if competent would not be respected. Now drinking itself has become glamorous and exalts the status of the drinker. Vastushastra also has become a status symbol in the same way. A highly educated, neo-rich individual would be furious if his belief in Vastushastra is called superstition. To enhance its prestige Vastushastra is supplemented with antiquity, aesthetics, scientific jargon, spirituality, culture and social sanction. If given glamour the educated neo - rich can be more easily coaxed into accepting Vastushastra for fear of unknown fate; for the fear itself could now be enjoyed! Again one need not go in for Vastushastra only when in adversity. It can be used to prevent misfortune and harsh conditions. Moreover, after making all recommended structural modifications, if the surroundings still remain unfavorable you cannot blame Vastushastra; for, it is now the effect of your own merit/demerit accumulated from previous lives! And we accept it readily.

Excitement regarding Feng Shui

A lot of conditions, stipulations, customs and conventions are to be adhered to and an assortment of Pooja materials and provision need to be collected to perform a religious ritual. The priests who perform these rituals expect the householders to obtain silk garment, perfumes, sandalwood, almonds and such other expensive articles to carry out the ritual. But a village priests cannot expect the poor farmer to fulfill all these demands. Then they find ways to cheat the stipulations and customs. If the farmer's wife cannot accompany him for the Pooja a betel nut can take her place. The silk Dhoti is used in place of a silk garment; dates could be used instead of almonds and so on with the other paraphernalia accompanying the ritual. As time passes these con jobs turn into powerful conventions making the rituals affordable. In the same way the affordability of Feng Shui helped it to replace the rigid Vastushastra.

No Structural Changes

Vastushastra involves a lot of knocking down and building up and causes damage to the existing structure. Who would not prefer to avoid all this toil and expenditure, if there was a way around it? This is what Feng Shui does. You need not be scared if your house is South-oriented. For, according to Feng Shui, South is in fact quite auspicious and brings honor and prestige to the owner of such a house. According to Vastushastra fire presides over the Southeast. In Feng Shui, its element is wood and it denotes wealth. Along with these contrasts both these ancient sciences show some common features too. They are: putting a horseshoe near the entrance, discarding a broken mirror, honoring a broom as goddess Lakshmi but hiding it away from visitors' sight, in a corner, etc. Feng Shui stresses the importance of neatness, cleanliness, decoration and peace. A combined picture of a pair of Chinese ducks, double happiness symbol and a Phoenix helps overcome difficulties in fixing a marriage. A smiling Buddha with children playing on his body is a magical remedy in Feng Shui. Moreover as we saw earlier, all these objects are cheap and readily available.

Vastushastra requires structural changes while Feng Shui requires only rearrangement of objects, changing their orientation to balance beneficial and harmful energies. If a person in difficulty finds these magical remedies more difficult to follow he will not go for them. He would rather let fate take its course. He will accept remedies if they are cheap and simple as part of his efforts to overcome his difficulties. Here are two important concepts in Feng Shui- Earth Luck and Heaven Luck. Heaven Luck means accumulated good luck. Those who are born with plenty of it lead a joyful life without difficulties. Those unlucky ones with very little of it have their Earth Luck to depend on because it is possible for them to change it. Feng Shui is the way of making Earth Luck favorable to an individual. If it works, well and good. If it does not, forget it. A human being seeks variety, and makes conscious efforts to achieve it in his life. Although cricket is a popular and glamorous game, the five-day test matches that mostly remained undecided had become boring. One-day matches and day and night matches were invented to retain the popularity and glamour of the game. People now find Indian Vastushastra boring and expensive. They needed some short cut. Feng Shui provides this.

Vastujotish

The Indian Vastushastra was then presented in the form of Vastujyotish, appropriating a few elements of astrology and also making convenient changes in it. The argument to justify this is- how can a dwelling be auspicious to all those who live in it, while their horoscopes are distinct from each other? Moreover no amount of changes can bring happiness to an individual whose horoscope forbids him from any joyful abode. So the Vastujyotishis now tell us that they are against making any expensive structural changes to a house. Since they know both Vastushastra and astrology, they can suggest inexpensive remedies that don't involve any structural changes. They maintain that fake Vastushastris have abused and maligned our ancient Indian Vastushastra.

Astrology, sorcery and Vastushastra are complementary to each other. So we come across astrologer cum sorcerer cum Feng Shui specialists too. These professionals work from their mobile offices in a Maruti van and operate near courts and hospitals. In olden days, they used to stalk people on their way to the Royal Courts. Not only the common people but even barons and chieftains needed their advice. Capricious king could make or break any one. Wherever there is anxiety and uncertainty people need astrologers and Feng Shui experts to soothe their frayed nerves. Man is not a biochemical robot with inbuilt rationality, logical thinking and scientific outlook. He has to deal with his instincts and emotions. Emotions play an important part in his decision-making activity. He wants peace of mind at any cost. Astrologers can appease stars hostile to him and make them kind and friendly towards him just as Vastushastris convert a hostile construction into a

friendly one. In short the sad and joyful events in the life of human beings are connected either to his stars or his dwelling.

In his efforts to find solutions to the uncertainty in life, man did not think of the validity or invalidity of the solutions scientifically. The only criterion he was prone to use to validate his inference was: how many people believed in it. Even here he never bothered about any statistical analysis to prove it. What gives him satisfaction is the assurance that he cannot be held responsible for what happens. He then proceeds to find ways to alleviate the circumstances in the same manner described above. These ways are found in Vastushastra or Feng Shui or astrology. This journey towards ignorance and superstition begins when the boundary of reason is crossed.

Prakash Ghatpande

Rationality Mission for Success in Life LET US REFORM.....

ANS is doing its best to eradicate prevailing superstitions, inculcate scientific temperament and instill value based rationalism among the society members so as to bring a new beginning in the life of an individual. Barring a few, rapidly deteriorating conditions of the society are making every one inactive, passive, submissive and sometimes to lose the patience. We are becoming quite helpless, fearful, and directionless. Compromises in every situation are becoming a sort of routine affair in every one's life. Heartless globalization, commercialization of every aspect of life, growing consumerism arising due to impact of powerful media like TV, easy accessibility of addictive materials which corrupt innocents, the deterioration of ethical values in the fast changing society etc have made everyone's life utterly miserable and dependent upon whims and fancies of policy makers. In addition to all these factors, the religious fanatics have joined hands with the greedy politicians who are responsible for policies that affect the life of the individuals and are encouraging the violence, cruelty, suppression of universal values, and self centered behavioral pattern. This has far reaching effect on the life of an ordinary person who is under stress due to fear, instability, and poor living conditions. Society is losing its vigor and enthusiasm and is always on the run after something..., which cannot be defined, identified and reached.

We have forgotten that we have the potential to come out of this situation. The pressure of the society consisting of persons with rational minds will change the existing conditions in totality. The basic issues can be solved by regaining the self-confidence and will to do. For that we need spirited and fully charged youth to bear the torch for a long march of the progress and development. The handful of rationales amongst us will join the youth in this mission whole-heartedly. Only youth has a power to bring the total change in the conditions of the life. Let us put first step in the path of the reformation.

We possess the thinking power and capacity to act after the requisite thought process; the gift bestowed upon the homo sapiens, thanks to the evolutionary process of million years. The self-confidence gained by the rational thinking needs the challenge. We, therefore, challenge you to come out of these passive, discouraging nihilistic conditions. The history of human being suggests us that the scientific attitude and rationale among us will solve the problems encountered while leading the modern life. To achieve success in real terms, we need rationalistic behaviour pattern. ANS is inviting one and all to join the mission.

The mission aims to encourage the participants to follow four action plans to begin with and thereby bring the desired change in the society. The suggested action plan is as under:

Action Plan 1

The age old superstitions consisting of traditions, rituals, mind boggling procedures require money, labour and time of the individual as well as society. The modern society can't afford to waste these valuable resources. In fact the superstitions ensure that the poor and downtrodden will remain in the same state forever and ever without giving any opportunity to come out of poor conditions. Let us take a pledge not to follow any of the superstitions and waste the resources. We will collectively oppose the authorities who spends tax payers money on the festivals and ceremonies like Kumbh Mela, temples/mosques/church maintenance, local festivals etc and allocate the funds for infrastructures like water, power, communication, transport, health-care, primary education and other welfare and development activities.

Action Plan 2

The person, deprived of rationality, will be victim of superstitions internally and life killing addiction externally. The addiction of any kind will deprive the person of his/her physical and mental health and subject the person to severe pain and in the long run shortening the life. At the individual level let us take oath not to fall pray to any addiction; even for just once too. The growing addiction has turned into a national burning issue in recent years. Maharashtra Government is openly encouraging the addictions making them accessible easily at all places and at all the hours and amassing the taxes at the expense of its citizen's health. Let us force our administrators to publish a white paper giving all the details about their short and long term plans to curb addiction in the state.

Action Plan 3

The growing unrest in the minority community due to intolerance among the society is breeding violence and encouraging terrorism thus disturbing peace and law and order. It is observed that the victims during any disturbance and riots are usually poor and downtrodden living in poor conditions and restoration of normal life takes long time. The violence destroys the peaceful co-existence of society and individual in the democratic state. Even the male chauvinism prevailing in the society is forcing women to take up extreme measures like committing suicide. Let us take an oath not be proud of the religion, caste, region, language or gender. We will never glorify violence of any kind to any one. We will compel the administration to oppose and punish such elements in the society.

Action Plan 4

AID (Acquired Immune Deficiency) is a threat to the society. The newly wed woman is the first victim of this dangerous disease, which will rob her of everything from her life. Let us avoid strictly any extra marital relations. It is common experience that after the marriage only, girl will comes to know that her husband is HIV positive. Even if girl's parents demand the HIV certificate, the would-be-husband refuses to produce the same. Let us insist to amend the marriage act to produce the HIV certificate while registering the marriage, which is compulsory nowadays. This will enable the concerned to demand the certificate legally and avoid future complications.

Let us reform forever. ANS invites everyone to join the campaign earnestly and wholeheartedly. The aspiring participants may contact nearest ANS units to know more about the mission.

DANGERS OF BLIND BELIEF

"The idea of having or allowing astrology taught in educational institutions is a regressive one," thundered Mr.Yechuri. He remembered Murli Manohar Joshi as having said that

astrology must be taught, as we must rely on our faith -(vishwas) - also. Recently in Chennai, a delegation of ministers was being received at a function. On the podium table were many water glasses filled with water and one of them had coloured water. This glass was actually used as a flower-vase: the gardener had just taken out the old flowers and was searching for new ones from the garden. Meanwhile the minister drank the coloured water thinking it to be some juice or soft drink. The minister was in hospital for 3 days, for his blind faith in the contents of the glass. So, deduced Mr.Yechuri, there is at least one difference between "vishwas" and scientific thinking: three days in hospital!

"The Government's changing of history records is a cause of concern," said Mr.Yechuri. The BJP and allies, to prove that Hinduism is a "pure" and native religion, have also to prove that the Aryans did not come from outside. For that, they have to further prove that Mohenjodaro and Harappa had some Aryan culture. One mark of Aryan culture is horses, which they needed for travel and warfare. They found a horse's bone near the site, so, it proves, they said, that they were Aryan settlements and that further proves that the Aryans are from here! However, when the bone was analysed, it was found to be only 200 years old!"

Mr.Yechuri pointed out another ridiculous gaff of the BJP - appointed historians. In the sites, a statue of a bull-like creature with long hair and mane was found. They fed a picture of it into computers, and one computer concluded that it looks like a horse! So, they said, it is actually a statue of a horse, and so it proves that they were from Aryan civilization, and so Aryans are from here. Well, Yechuri said with a smile, "When you call a bull a horse, and try to convince everyone that a statue of a bull is actually that of a horse, we can imagine what sort of ideologies and theories you have!"

Mr.Yechuri recalled a joke from his university professorship days. A professor digs in his garden about 10 feet deep, and finds some sort of wire. So he rushes to a colleague and exclaims, "Look what I found. It proves that the ancient Indians were very advanced - they had telephone!" "Excellent," says the colleague, and begins to dig deeper in the same spot. He finds nothing, so he rushes to the first professor and exclaims, "See, I didn't find anything, so it proves that the very, very ancient Indians were still more advanced - they had wireless!"

On measuring "true Hinduism", Mr.Yechuri had something to say. He hails from Andhra Pradesh, where, in some regions a girl is automatically married off to her mother's brother as soon as she comes of age. In North India such a practice would be considered despicable, and the offenders probably lynched. The question is, who is the true Hindu, the North Indians for condemning it, or the Andhraites for allowing it?

The futility of measuring "true Hinduism" can also be seen from the "Mahabali" example. In Kerala and among Keralites, the Onam festival is celebrated. Its theme is that a good and benevolent king Mahabali visits his subjects once a year on that day. The subjects are happy that the king lives at least one day a year for them. In North India, Mahabali is a rakshash who is killed by Vishnu, and whose death was necessary so that the world may exist. So, now, who is the true Hindu, the North Indians for condemning Mahabali, or the Keralites for worshipping him?

Preventing religious beliefs is like Ram telling Krishna-worshippers not to follow Krishna, and Krishna telling Ram-worshippers not to follow Ram. From this we can see that even God does not have the authority to tell you whom to worship and whom not to worship. Atheism is also a belief, so God has no right to condemn anyone for being an atheist. And if even God has no authority in religious matters, who are these saffronites, the BJP and its allies, to tell us?

(Excerpts from the speech of Mr. Sitaram Yechuri, a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of India, Marxist, New Delhi on 11th October 2003 at Nigdi, Pune. Nigel J. Shaughnessy prepared the transcript)

Sitaram Yechuri

INDIAN SCIENCE: PAST & PRESENT

This is a very readable book. Every Indian interested in the progress of science in the country and in developing the right scientific temper, should read this book. I am sure all those young students who hero worship Narlikar would want to read this book. I hope they recommend it to their teachers and parents too. Narlikar has analyzed the scientific situations – past and present, correctly; not only that he is also positive about the future. Any lesser mortal analyzing the science scenario in the country could have become cynical. I suppose that this is the mark of a good academician.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the Indian scientific progress in the ancient ages till about the nineteenth century. The second part - the best part of the book, discusses about how to live in the age of science and develop the right scientific temper. The third part has assorted articles, some of which does not fit the title of the book at all.

Narlikar, in his own subtle, tongue in cheek style, takes a good-humoured dig at Vedic mathematics, astrology as a university course and the appalling state science journalism in the country. His comments on lack of professionalism among the scientists, lack of encouragement to deserving scientists, the role of rote learning in schools, the importance of universities as seats of higher learning, etc. make very good reading.

There is no doubt that the scientific temper is an urgent need in the Indian context. Narlikar extensively writes on this topic. In this regard the role of science journalism is stressed so that the public in general can be educated. The sorry state of our educational institutions, the segregation of good research laboratories from the source of young talents and students, will be an eye opener to many of those interested in the progress of science in the country, and those interested in taking up pure science as a career.

In a review of the path of science taken in India, the author admits that Indian science has taken a few wrong turns. He candidly says that it is better to admit mistakes, correct them and then go ahead in a very scientific path instead of deliberating, covering up and justifying the “greatness” ancient scientists. About vedic astrology, the author clearly states that it is an oxymoron – a contradiction in terms. The author proves, through various contexts and ancient texts that astrology and vedas have no relations. The decision by the University Grants Commission to start courses in astrology also comes for severe criticism. This piece is very interesting – it is commendable that a person of Narlikar is taking this stand. I hope other scientists and rational minded Indians do so too.

Author writes extensively on ancient Indian astronomy, the search for Indian records of explosion of crab supernova. The articles on why study astronomy and astrology versus astronomy, the author gives his a very forward thinking, outward looking view. He justifies why investments and funds in fundamental fields such as astronomy are essential for keeping the nation, especially its young minds, on the right track. He urges his own scientific community to do more for taking their research to the masses so that the right scientific temper is inculcated in the public in general. Author's comments on how to bring about synthesis of science and religion are pretty good. Narlikar deliberates on man's quest for truth by taking hold of either religion or science.

Narlikar has many things to say to the reader, vis-à-vis the Indian scientific scene, the scientific temper, astronomy versus astrology, the synthesis of science, the state of the universities and funding for research, etc. Almost all pieces are well written and Narlikar shares his own opinions openly – probably he could not do so previously in his official capacity.

On the down side, his piece on science fiction does not fit into the book at all. The sole purpose of the piece was to say that one of his fictional ideas have been accepted. Narlikar has written about this, umpteen numbers of times – it only makes a bragging piece, that's all.

Other than one or two minor points, the book is very well written. The book should be made available to all our present and future science students, science policy makers, funding agency bosses, vice chancellors of universities and a few politicians who claim to have science degrees and behave unscientifically otherwise.

The Scientific Edge

The Indian Scientist from Vedic to Modern Times

by J.V. Narlikar

Penguin, July 2003, 216 pages, Rs. 250/-

Anuradha Bhagwat

PITIABLE CONDITION OF A RATIONALIST!

If you are a rationalist and openly support skepticism, rationalism and scientific temperament, you will be generally treated as though you are a freak from some alien country. The people surrounding you at your working place treat you as though you are some joker.

“ I honestly feel sorry for this guy” someone will comment at a hearing distance from you. To live in this world not believing in a higher power, doubting that the God almighty exists or that he keeps an account of your sins... That is such a sad, cynical way to live!”

Another colleague, who spends most of his income on astrological predictions, palmistry, Feng Shui, Vaastushastra etc, will say,

“ It's just too bad, he's chosen to cut himself off from the world of the paranormal, restricting himself to the limited universe of what can be seen and heard through empirical evidence.”

Your girl friend had undergone intense course on Naturopathy, and earns her living by selling the herbal medicine, tonics and medicines diluted to one molecule per thousands of litres of water in the belief that water ‘remembers’ the curative properties of the medicine. One day she will say, “ Don't get me wrong – logic and reason have their place, but you fail to recognize the danger of going too far with the modern medical common sense to the exclusion of new medical remedies like herbal medicine, Yoga, Reiki, Chakra healing and energy field alignment”.

One more pseudo-rationalist will comment,

“ I admit, science might be great for curing diseases, exploring space, cataloguing the natural phenomena of our world, saving endangered species, extending the human life span, and enriching the quality of that life. But at the end of the day, science has nothing to tell us about the human soul, and that's the critical thing you are missing. I would hate for your soul to be lost forever because of a stubborn doubt over the actual existence and nature of that soul”

Self proclaimed astrologer and a lifelong devotee would blame your lack of faith on an accident of your birth. He would analyze your astrological positions and declare,

“ You can’t entirely help your self, being Gemini. Geminis are always very skeptical and destined to feel pain throughout life as a result of their close-mindedness. If one tries to introduce you to anything new, even remotely made-up, you immediately start talking about ‘ evidence of this and proof for that’. If only you, poor fellow, were open-minded enough to stop attacking everything with your brain and just once look into your heart, you will find all the proof you needed. But sadly, you are unable to let even a little bit of imagination drive the core beliefs.”

Your own brother who is practicing some obscure healing technique will also take pity on you and say.

“ It’s bad enough when someone has ignorance to reject this latest homeopathy in spite of its tremendous popularity. But my brother isn’t even willing to try a free introductory course. This homeopathy has the potential to free humanity from the crippling yoke of common sense, unshackling billions from the centuries old chains of scientific precedent, and he still won’t give it a try”.

“ I realize,” he continues, ”that it seems he is very happy with his narrow little common sense based worldview. But when you think of all the widely embraced beliefs that are excluded by that way of thinking, you have to feel kind of sad”.

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THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build



Rationalist Society

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Mystery of life

I cannot conceive of a god who rewards and punishes creatures or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves. Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death; let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egotism cherish such thoughts. I am satisfied with the mystery of eternity of life and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny of the reason that manifests itself in nature.

- Carl Sagan

www.antisuperstition.com

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THE LATEST SPIRITUAL INDUSTRY

One should have lot of patience and an iron will to go through these pearls of wisdom, which are regularly being poured by the paranoid Babas and Matajis in the morning hours on almost all TV channels. These high-tech Babas and Matajis have learnt all the gimmicks to attract thousands of followers. The word play, pseudo scientific examples, the command on oratory, skill to dramatise given situation and events and of course their body language mesmerizes the listeners who fall prey to them. However if you investigate their personnel life it is full of skullduggery, cheating and exploiting the gullible. It may happen that after some time people will forget the real teachings of the religion and start believing these cult figures, which is quite damaging even to the religions. This must be stopped at any cost. The society should come forward to expose these merchants of god or at least strengthen the organizations like ANS who are challenging them with their limited resources at their disposal.

The Ford and the Carnegie empires were built on slave driving, on the shiploads of Negroes captured from Africa and brought into the Free World. The Nobel Empire was built on the profits from producing dynamites. The third generations of these empire builders now engage themselves in big time philanthropy, so that they can atone for their forefathers' ill-gotten money. In India it is given to the god men and god women, who by nature are philanthropists to build empires of spirituality in order to save this planet from going to **dark holes** (not black holes!) as said by Babaji Shivananda, of whom we will learn a lot very shortly.

Year after year, we in India are reaping a bumper crop of Bhagwans, Devis, Babas, Buvas, Matajis who are globalizing Indian Spiritualism. Bhagawan Rajanish was virtually thrown out by the USA government, as they were afraid of his spiritual powers! Our Satya Sai Baba is a friend indeed to many a politicians and other big shots, whenever they are in need. He runs grand educational institutions and many charities like hospitals, where he provides health packages to the poor people of India. That many of the poor recipients of his charity, find their kidneys missing in the bargain is another story. Surely he cannot be blamed for the deeds of the mean medical staff in the hospitals! Our Prajapita Brahmakumaris have built an empire on Mount Abu. Their institution now owns practically all the available land in Abu. They cater to the spiritual and other needs of the Diamond merchants of India. The ex prime minister Shri Narasimha Rao, who is recently absolved of all criminal charges against him by the supreme court, badly needed Chandraswami known for his involvement in many a shady deals. Dharendra Brahmachari who was a friend in need to Mrs. Indira Gandhi had a private runway for his plane to land in the secluded hills of Himalayas, where incidentally he had a gun factory.

Despite recession our spiritual industry is thriving and prospering. God and spirituality being in great demand - there is no dearth of customers, no problem in selling their wares, no set back or accumulation of stocks, no recession in this industry. Spirituality has become such a fad these days that not only common gullible people but even many highly educated professionals willingly suspend their judgment and believe in the so called miraculous powers of these fraudulent Babas and Buvas, Devis and Matajis dole out peace and tranquility to their followers, putting them on the path of self realization, of course for some consideration. There is ground to suspect that some of their highly qualified professional disciples have a symbiotic relationship with the spiritual gurus. Some highly educated professionals themselves become god men. One such professional turned a god man is Avadhoot Baba Shivanand. But before turning to the exploits of this Babaji let us ponder over why people turn to religion, god men and occult sciences in this space age.

Why do people turn to meditation, spirituality and occult sciences?

All human beings are beset with the nagging questions: Why I am here in this world? Who am I? Where from did I come and where to am I going? What is the purpose of human life? Sciences are not able to answer any of such questions nor can they foretell people what is in store for them in the future, and they frankly admit this inability of theirs. Religions, spiritualists and practitioners of occult sciences, however, presume to know not only the answers to these questions but also to predict the future of their followers and even to change their destinies. In one of the issues of 'Inner Strength', it is very succinctly put why the motley bunch of students, film stars and corporate honchos are drawn to super power sources. It is because it is no longer enough just to 'be' (be what you are) but one has to be the best by adding s (for stress) and t (for tension) to become the best. A few have natural inclination towards spirituality from childhood. But many turn to spirituality and occult sciences because of a sudden jolt or accident. Other reasons are partnership problems, relationship, financial and health worries, etc. People seek deeper meaning in life and want to connect with the real self, to go within. And the most important reason is that there is a profusion of Gurus, Babas, Buvas, Devis and Matajis who are ever ready to help these people in need of spiritual solace.

Religions have developed profound concepts like an omnipotent, omniscient and eternal entity – God, as also the related concepts like destiny, influence of the planets and constellations on human life, heaven and hell, final judgment, Atma, Paramatma, holy spirit, deities, devils, demons ghosts and what not. They have also propounded theories like the Hindu Karmavipak, the cycle of birth and death, merging into the Paramtatra through self- realization, realizing god, etc.

The occult sciences have their own theories and explanations couched in scientific language. Avadhoot Baba Shivananda publishes a bimonthly magazine 'Inner Strength', quoted above, in which ample scope is provided for all religions and occult sciences to explain and also propagate their theories. One finds a number of articles in this magazine on subjects like Vastu, Feng shui, Gem Therapy, Pendulum dousing, Power of pyramids, Mystical beads of Rudraksha, Divine symbols and compassion, Effects-good or bad- of chants and mantras and what have you. Their logic, like language with a profusion of scientific jargon, confounds the gullible people. The following quote from an article on Gem Therapy (page 64 of May-June 2003 issue of Inner Strength) illustrates the point. "The seven Chakras are associated with the seven planets and twenty seven Nakshatras so that whenever these planets have any **specific push or pull** on our **soul bodies** the Chakras start **acting adversely or beneficially**. Hence the **cosmic rays** which act as a bridge between the Chakras and the planets either wane or wax according to the **phases that the trajectory of our lives** go through." (stress is ours.) These profound words, smacking of scientific theories and concepts and pretending to give a logical explanation mesmerize even educated people who feel that they have finally found salvation at the feet of an all knowing god man. Staunch belief, deep faith and a mind set of conviction beyond doubt being the very foundation of religion and spirituality, Agnostics, atheists, doubting toms and scientists have no place in this world, for they demand proofs for everything.

Avadhoot Baba Nityananda

Shivanand, lovingly called Babaji by his devotees, claims to be the disciple of the late Avadhoot Baba Nityanand, Bhagavan for his followers. Bhagwan Nityanand and others initiated the Siddha lineage, which is now being carried forward with missionary zeal by Babaji. So claim Babaji's disciples. Nityanand's first and foremost disciple was Jananand Swami of Kanhangad. The divine caves at Kanhangad are said to have been planned, designed and carved by Nityananda with his own hands. Nityanand hails from Mangalore and was already popular there before he came to Kanhangad, where his divine 'Leela' (astonishing feats) began to manifest. Even as a small boy he started bringing children of different social status together and liberating Harijans from the stigma of unsociability and educating them with the help of Shri T.R. Ishwar Iyer, his foster father. Nityanand traveled from Himalayas to Kanyakumari, Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia and several other countries.

He developed another scenic spot near Kanhangad called Guruvanam, which too was planned by Nityanand himself. Here there is a Bhadrakali temple, Dhyanamandap and also a beach called Bekal beach, where he used to go for swimming. There are eight pillars erected in the memory of eight Siddhas who took Samadhi here. A perennial sacred spring called 'Papanashini Ganga', flows here. This place is well connected with the major cities of India. It is also a major station on the Konkan railway line where all trains stop. Nityanand's samadhi and temple are at another place, Ganeshpuri, near Mumbai, in the Thane district. There are hot water springs here. Nityanand had millions of disciples all over the world. He is most popular among the Shettis. Being an abandoned child, it is said, he was brought up by a poor farmer couple and later adopted by a pious advocate, Ishwar Iyer. Ram, as he was called by Ishwar Iyer accompanied him on long pilgrimages to Triveni, Kashi, etc. From here Ram went to Himalayas alone and to the grief of Iyer did not return for many years. When Ishwar Iyer divided his estate, he gave Ram an equal share like all his sons. Ram, however respectfully refused to accept any thing.

Nityanand's devotees have written many of his biographies narrating his miracles and eulogizing him for his charity, egalitarian philosophy, kind heart and immense love for children. Two devotees of his, Narayan and Gopal, have compiled all his teachings, guidance and counseling into a book called Chidakash Geeta. Like any other mystic, it is difficult to understand the cryptic language of this book. But a few point from this book and biographies of Nityanand throw light upon the saintliness of this great man.

Despite having rich Saraswat devotees in Mumbai, Nityanand used to sleep in a Pan-Beedi shop when he went there. He taught one Monappa, how to make some simple Ayurvedic medicines like Triphala churna, Brahmi oil, etc., providing him with a clean and socially useful means of livelihood. He started a new scheme called Balabhojan, whereby many poor children are given a square meal every morning. Before serving the meal, it is made sure that the children have cleaned their teeth properly and bathed. In case found wanting, they are sent to have a bath in the river before taking the meal. He has established many educational institutions for the children of the area. This scheme of Balabhojan that started in 1938, at Ganeshpuri, has spread to many other places and is still growing. Originally started in a small shed, now it has a

big dining hall with a kitchen, pantry, storeroom, etc., which was inaugurated by the then chief minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Kannamwar in 1957. Many saintly souls like the Shankaracharya of Puri, Anandashram of Chitrapur, Vishweshwarteerth, Swami Chinmayanand, as well as politicians like Nijalingappa, Jatti, Kannamwar often visited Nityanand. Nityanand did not believe in observing any fasting days. Every day the body must get its food, he said. He once made a disciple who was fasting on the day he came to meet Nityanand to eat triple the usual amount of food, giving up his fast.

He was well aware of what people surrounding Ganeshpuri needed. During the rainy season the farmers and laborers did not have much work to do. So he used to start all his road building and construction works during this season. The laborers were given coupons to have their meals in the hotels of Ganeshpuri. This served a dual purpose. The idle labor had work and the hotels got customers during the slack season. Nityanand passed away on 8th August 1961. In 1964 Shri Bhimeshwar Sadguru Nityananda Sansthan was established under the chairmanship of the then minister Mr. Hari Govind Vartak. The board of trustees has changed several times since. Each successive committee has been extending and improving this institution at Ganeshpuri.

Shivanand

Now we come to the protagonist of this narrative, the present self-proclaimed shining star in the Siddha Lineage initiated by Bhagwan Nityanandji. Shivanand is supposed to have started spiritual quest at the tender age of eight years. This boy caught the eye of a Siddha-a Himalayan Sanyasi known as the 108th Swami Jagannathji, who soon lost contact with this protégé of his. Shivananda is also blessed successively by various Gurus like Shirdi Sai Baba and Shivaswaroop Sadguru Nityanand. It was Guru Nityananda who revealed to him the ultimate benefit of mankind in the Kaliyug, i.e., Siddha Shaktipat by a Siddha Guru, the Jap and the Siddha Mantra. He also claims that Gurudev Nityanand conferred the Shambhavi Shakti on him for two purposes: 1. Destroying negativity and 2. Healing humanity's ailments. In the biographies of Nityanand, there does not seem to be any mention of this ultimate benefit of mankind being bestowed by him (Nityananda) on any of his disciples. He practiced socialism by treating people equally irrespective of their caste, religion, social status or gender. He preferred to stay in a poor man's dwellings and not in the palatial houses of his rich disciples. Shivanand's egalitarianism is of a different brand. He awakens the hidden powers of all humans by activation of their Kundalini Shakti. Most importantly he maintains that it is possible for common people to perform miracles of healing most dreadful of diseases and even overcome risk to life and property. But for that to happen perhaps one must attend his courses.

In reality, however, he has been exploiting skillfully Nityanand's reputation to establish and expand his own spiritual industry. As the devotees of Nityanand got an inkling of what this latest Babaji is up to, they woke up and started challenging him. Newspapers and magazines are attacking and exposing him. Movements are being organized to oppose his activities. Who is this Avadhoot Baba Shivanand after all?

Spiritual Healing

As stated earlier he is a highly qualified professional. This self-proclaimed spiritual heir of Nityanand is one Mr. Rajendra Ratada, born in Delhi. He is M.B.A. He married several years back and has a wife and two children. From a normal run of the mill-married man, he blossomed into a Baba, then a Brahmachari and now Swayambhu (born of himself) Shivanand. He calls himself Avadhoot, i.e., one who has shaken off from himself all worldly feelings and obligations. One can understand his Avadhootdom in the rough and tumble of a city like Delhi! But to believe that a man who has enjoyed the bliss of married life and has raised kids of his own can turn a Brahmachari- the state of an unmarried student of religiosity with strict continence and chastity! If our Kunti of Mahabharat, after being ravished by the Sun god and giving birth to a brave son Karna, can become a virgin again, why not our young man Shivanand? This is Kaliyug after all. As for his Avadhootdom, an episode related by a retired government official is quite illuminating. This official had to accompany a well-known Tantrik (taught in the Tantras-the doctrine of magical and mystical formularies), on his tour to Jakarta. Rajendra Ratada was in this entourage. During the day these Avadhoots were busy giving sermons on the Ramayan while at dusk they were off in search of nightclubs. Rajendra Ratada and his friend ordered the poor officer to guide them to a good nightclub. Reaching the club, they both fell for a girl and insisted that the girl accompany them to their hotel. The official warned them that such a step would damage the reputation of our country. He was asked to go his way, leaving the Avadhoots to themselves. Now when this officer sees Rajendra Ratada giving sermons on the TV, he cannot contain his anger. So he at last met with Mr. Rajeev Sharma of the magazine Pratham Pravakta (the foremost proclaimer) and requested him to expose this fraudulent Babaji. The Babaji has amassed enormous wealth, bought properties and built palatial Ashrams. His modus operandi is as follows. To establish his credentials as the heir to Swami Nityanand, he exhibits huge portraits of the Swamiji. As said earlier he claims that Swamiji himself revealed Siddh Shaktipat, Jap and Siddh Mantra. Shivanand is simply carrying forward Nityanand

Swamiji's mission. This he is doing by propagating Swamiji's thoughts all over the world, in big cities and small. He claims to be able to change people's horoscopes and thereby their destinies and make millionaires out of ordinary men. He has established an institution called, 'World Spiritual Healing Foundation' in Delhi with its offices spread all over India. As per Rajeev Sharma's report, in the Feb. 2003 issue of 'Pratham Pravakta' (p.31) Babaji runs a number of spiritual courses of 2 days duration and charges fees of Rs. 1600/- for each of them from every participant. The courses are as follows.

The first six courses, viz., The Siddha Inner Strength, The Advance Siddh, Shambhavi, Advance Shambhavi, Intensive Siddh, and Lumerian Temple healing are of two days duration and the fees are Rs.1600/-for each participant. The last course, the Master of Diksha course of two days duration costs a participant Rs.6000/-. Babaji has a way of recruiting participants for these courses. He holds huge 'mass healing' congregations where his agents mingle with the audience and tell them stories of miraculous recoveries from terminal and incurable diseases effected by Babaji's Grace. In the March-April 2003 issue of 'Inner Strength' (p 61/62), Meenakshi Sundaram talks about not only healing patients but even effecting stalled transfers of people by making the relevant files languishing in red tape move by novel methods like 'Pillar of Light', 'Siddh healing' and Organ Transplant (of course without operation, telescopically without ever touching the patient.) Meditation, Shambhavi and Shaktipat are some more methods which Babaji and his disciples practice. A universal remedy for all ailments and difficulties and problems of life has been found at last!

People who are at their wits' end due to nagging health problems and other worries believe in such concocted episodes and hope that they too can overcome their difficulties with the help of Babaji's grace. His agents then goad such people into joining the spiritual course, giving them the address of the nearest spiritual center. There they are told about various spiritual courses and the benefit accrued from them. First they have to undergo Spiritual Inner Strength Students' course. Here they are taught to meditate on seven Chakras in the body to cleanse it of all the negativity (whatever it means!) This course is completed in two days in just Rs.1600/-. Once the prey is caught in the clutches of the Spiritual Healing System, other courses claiming more and more spiritual benefits for the devotees who are now hooked on, follow. These courses are offered and conducted all over the country. Out of the Rs.1600/- collected from each participant, Rs.500 go to Babaji. The demand for the Spiritual Healing Courses is so big that quite a few courses are conducted by Babaji's erstwhile wife Sadhana, now only a disciple, probably staying under the same shelter as the Babaji himself. This surely is big money. But this is not all.

While administering spiritual healing Babaji uses Chants engraved on metal sheets, crystals, Rudraksha beads, Photos, Magic Bands, Cassettes, CDs, and what not. All these gimmicks are on sale hauling a huge profit. Things worth Rs.15 to 20 are sold for Rs. 100 to 800. No wonder this expensive approach to god realization or spirituality is available to only the rich. Common men and women, thankfully, are deprived of it. This is in stark contrast of what Babaji's Gurudev, Swami Nityanand believed in and practiced. The Guru's devotees spread over a large spectrum from laborers in tattered clothes to the rich Shettis whose business turn over ran into crores of rupees. Swami Nityanand never turned his Spiritual achievement into a money minting business.

Siddha Sankul

Selling mustard oil is another lucrative business of Shivanand Babaji. He claims that this oil in which he injects his spiritual powers cures even terminal cancer cases. This of course is prominently and widely advertised, so that Shivanand can sell a bottle of 10 ml of oil for Rs.30. A favorite devotee of Shivanand also sells similar potent oil, which she has concocted from mustard oil and some herbal medicines. This also is claimed to cure all diseases. Shivanand obviously does not inject his powers in this Lucknow oil. Herbal medicines seem to be equally powerful. But that is a moot point. The fact is that these fraudulent Buvas and Babas, in the name of the ancient science of Ayurveda, exploit their devotees through their spiritual dispensaries while the superstitious flocks choose to turn a blind eye to this stark reality! Shivanand Babaji turned Brahmachari, since last ten years, lives in a much extended family. He insists that his wife and children of yester years are no more than his disciples. He has built a huge Ashram worth crores of rupees in the Dwarika area of Delhi. He has similar establishments in Mumbai, Chennai, Lucknow, Kanpur, Andhra and Karnataka. He has amassed billions by exploiting Swami Nityanand's name and fame. If this exploitation is not stopped in time, the revered Personality of the great spiritualist, Nityanand too, will be sullied, when, eventually Shivanand is exposed. It will be a rude shock to the devotees of Nityanand Swami. Some time back, Shivanand tried to fool these devotees. Nityanand's devotees include a number of rich Shettis. They all revere Nityanand as their god and call him Bhagwan. Cashing on this popularity, Shivanand established his centers in Mumbai, which move was opposed by Nityanand's followers. They were however overpowered by Shivanand's wealth. He started minting money posing as a devotee of Nityanand. So far he has raised 60 lakh to build an

Ashram in Ganeshpuri, so as to be able to spread his roots there. He wants to build a big complex for Siddhas called The Siddha Sankul in the village Bhinar in Vasai Taluka, just 25 km away from Ganeshpuri. The land for this complex has been grabbed illegally from its original owner. Shivanand has put up a board there proclaiming the sight to be, "Avadhoot Baba Shri Nityanand Shri Siddha Sankul." He has already given the contract for building the proposed complex to Shri Developers. The real owner of the land naturally opposes Shivanand's scheming. He has put up a board of public notice, juxtaposed to Shivanand's board whereby he accuses Shivanand of illegally grabbing his land. People of Bhivandi and Vasai Taluka are enraged at this deceit of Parshuram Patil, the real owner of the land by Shivanand. Recently, when Shivanand and his stooges visited Bhinar in order to seal the deal by bribing the real owner of the land, the angry villagers stormed them and drove them away. The confrontation was so violent that had Shivanand and his stooges not run away for their lives, the villagers would have killed them all. There is a lot of opposition to Shivanand at other places too. But so far he has successfully shielded himself by appropriating the goodwill that exists for Nityanand's work. Moreover he has won over a few of the trustees of Ganeshpuri (by fair or foul means) who willingly aid and abet Shivanand in his evil schemes. There is now a real danger of Shivanand completely overtaking the Ganeshpuri Trust of Swami Nityanand obliterating the sanctity of the holy place.

Pearls of Wisdom

As stated earlier Shivanand publishes a glossy bi-monthly magazine, the purpose of which is to promote his own murky philosophy and to advertise his own activities, the courses that he runs and the worthless products like the power injected mustard oil, CDs of his sermons, bhajans and such other wares at exorbitant prices. Practically on every page of every issue, his own photograph is prominently displayed. The photograph of Nityanand Swami too is displayed in one corner of every page. Every issue contains one or two articles on occult sciences, religions and various sects. Self-realization and spirituality are emphasized. Many articles relate experiences of his own devotees eulogizing their Babaji. Much of the matter is repeated number of times. But most interesting than anything else in these magazines is the Pearls of Wisdom issuing forth from Babaji's mouth and quoted by his devotees or issuing from Babaji's pen. A few of them are quoted here for the amusement of our readers.

Pearls of wisdom (From the Issues of INNER STRENGTH)

'A Rudraksha Rosary accelerates the meditating process as the electromagnetic field of Rudraksha is much bigger than our mind.'

How does Miss Charu measure the electromagnetic fields of the mind (each meditator's mind) and that of the Rudraksha Rosary is a mystery. A bright idea struck my mind. Why not keep electro-magnets all around us to accelerate meditating?

Regarding the value of chanting-healing sounds, it is said,

'Each body cell has its own frequency. Human cells respond to pure vibrations born of Mantras of the holy name. ... Each word uttered leaves a subtle impression erasing by its positivity the previous negative imprints.'

While answering a question, Babaji warns, *'Never venture into the reasons for all that you experience. ... Whatever comes your way regard that as Guru prasad and get as much as you can.'*

Forget you are a rational being and suspend your judgment.

Babaji clarifies the all-powerful Shivapanchakshari Mantra that is drawn from the five elements of nature-earth, sky, water, air and fire and is capable of cleansing all of them. In 'Namah Shivaya, Na consecrates the Prithvi Tatwa and Ma Jala Tatwa; Shi energizes Agni Tatwa, Va Vayu Tatwa and Ya Akash Tatwa; Om purifies Brahma Tatwa and the crown Chakra.'

Babaji warns us, 'Always remember whenever you realize you are out of your body, then you must know that your body is dead and it is time to move on.'

Babaji surely must have realized this, remembered to move on and also warns us to do the same in our turn!

For Atman to be realized, one must forget both Jnyana (knowledge of god) and Vijnyana (knowledge that one has realized god). Only when one knows but is not aware that he knows, one can see the Atman.

Very simple. Isn't it? To an onlooker a steamer which is in sea, appears to touch the sea water but in reality it is not so.

God said in extreme Kaliyug I will make the most sacred and inaccessible Siddha Knowledge and Shaktipst easily available for every human being for a very limited period. Note that it is only for a very limited period, so hurry up! Babaji adds this period has started from June 2000 (already nearly four years are over!) Those of you who join the Siddha path now, are like to attain self-realization within 3,6 or 9 years and experience the total richness and full glory of human life.

Babaji, for the benefit of the whole of humanity has been generously conducting several courses for this purpose through his World Spiritual Healing Foundation. But the multitudes of human beings and the affordability of the courses are two big constraints. So the vast majority of human beings have no hope of salvation!

These are but a few of the Pearls of Wisdom collected from just a couple of issues of the 'Inner Strength.' Those who are interested can gather quite a fortune from all the issues so far published! The important point here, however, is whether we should let this gibberish pass and spread unabated and unchallenged.

In need of Support

ANS, in fact, have exposed many a Babas and Buvas of the Local Variety. Each of them is but a small fry. The real big and powerful ones are beyond the reach of ANS activists, whose main resource is only their dedication. The Big Babajis flex their financial muscle and drag the ANS activists into lawsuits. This is a great deterrence, for precious time, money and energy are wasted in fighting the lawsuits. The Babajis are well aware of the fact that organizations and individuals can do them no harm. And they merrily go about their business of exploiting our cherished ancient religions, philosophies and sciences like the Ayurveda and the Yogashastra on the one hand and on the other, appropriating the good work of social and spiritual upliftment done with utter dedication by our saints. The greatest attribute of these saints was their simplicity. They worked with the poor ignorant people trying to ameliorate their circumstances by catering to their real needs. They did not have to run high priced courses in spirituality affordable only to the rich.

Our Babaji "traces his lineage through Gorakshanath Baba to the Guru of all Siddha Gurus - Lord Dattatreya, who was imparted the sacred and secret Siddha knowledge by Lord Shiva himself, for the benefit of mankind." His lineage of the recent Gurus is already discussed. Nityanand Swami's devotees at Ganeshpuri often complain that Shivanand Babaji's agents visit Ganeshpuri and photograph the Balabhojan programmes there and publish them in their magazines as their own.

In our Puranas, it is said that Lord Ganapati, in order to fight the demon Sinduraasur, organized an army of elephant riding archers and women warriors - his Ashtanayika along with the common people of that area. In order to fight these modern spiritual giants, we need to organize an army of professionals: Honest lawyers and retired judges to defend us in the court of law; doctors, engineers and scientists to enlighten the ignorant gullible masses; journalists who dare expose the giants; dedicated officers of the administrative and political cadres and most importantly the middle class and upper middle class intelligentsia, for, if they do not give up sitting on the fence and enter the fray, the survival of their tribe is in danger. Can we rope in a few honest politicians as well?

Suman Oak

BEWITCHED AND BEWILDERED

Many interior regions of Maharashtra have native, tribal inhabitants. These areas are isolated from the advancements that the rest of our society is witnessing. The advancement or progress has been largely due to better living conditions and education.

The tribals are poor and uneducated. Age-old myths about bad and evil, rituals and poojas rule the lives of these tribals. This is very unfortunate. A very barbaric tradition, namely that of witch hunting, is seen to be quite prevalent, in these areas. An assumed person, mostly a poor, hapless woman, should not be blamed for all ills and problems that are afflicting their lives.

Recently a meet was held in Nandurbar, under the aegis of ANS, where tribal participants were informed about the inappropriateness, illogicalness and futility of the practice of witch-hunting. Arguments and examples were put forth to show that such a practice was nothing but bogus. Innocent victims and their families recounted how they were put through inordinate amount of humiliation, isolation and hardship, only because some arbitrary elder in the tribe named a particular woman to be a witch.

Is not ironical that our society has such a stark contrast – on one extreme we boast of being scientifically advanced and on the other extreme we have something to be ashamed of, a completely anachronistic, unscientific practice of witch hunting?

Why and how is a woman “designated” as a witch? A murder, some illness, a theft or robbery, a food shortage, lack of rains, an epidemic and umpteen other afflictions may be prevalent in a tribal locality. The leaders of the tribe, to keep themselves in power and hold their control over the tribe, have to furnish some reasons to their clan members. Probably at the behest of a local politician or vested interests of a rich trader, the tribe leaders designate a woman as a witch. She is blamed for the affliction. The explanation given is that this woman harbours ill will and hence this affects the tribe.

But is this really true? Can a person’s ill wishes really cause murders, food shortages or epidemics? Is there any logic in these arguments? The true reason could be hidden elsewhere. Maybe the local political leader or a rich trader wants a liaison with this woman, maybe she spurred his advances, maybe she holds a patch of land that this person wants to grab, who knows? By making her and her family an outcast, in the face of isolation and humiliation, the so-called “witch” could be pressurized and intimidated into submission.

After she is designated a witch, a woman, who earlier probably thought herself to be bewitched and beguiling to others, may be suddenly bewildered at the course of events that have befallen her and her family!

The practice of witch hunting is definitely out of step with the twenty first century. In medieval Europe, witch-hunting and burning a woman at stake was done but that is history. Education and scientific outlook have made these societies liberal, equal and civilized. When will we say that the practice of witch hunting in Maharashtra is relegated to the pages of history?

Avinash Patil

SCIENCE AND RELIGION: TWO POLES APART

I intend to present a novel contrast between science and religion, a contrast, which though evident, has not yet to my knowledge been pointed by anyone. This contrast ensues from the different amount of empirical data science and religion contain. If the essential data of sciences are mostly empirical and objective in nature, the essential data of science are mostly neither empirical nor objective. Many implications follow from this fact, but before discussing them it would be better to state briefly the nature of science and religion.

Nature of Science and Religion

Although there are both conceptual and behavioral sciences, for the present discussion I am taking only natural sciences as my model. Hence I would say that science is an empirical attempt to understand some natural phenomenon in a systematic and comprehensive way. Except for the horizon-areas, everything in science is empirical and objective in nature. There is nothing subjective or esoteric in the scientific attitude. This is why the investigators of the same phenomenon, whether they belong to different times or places, all arrive at roughly the same conclusions. Thus scientific knowledge is common for the whole world. Scientists try their best to eliminate the subjective element from the whole investigation.

The promise of absolute and ultimate liberation of the believer from every misery, limitation, bondage and worry is the essence of religion. The liberation is to be realised in some transcendental existence after death. As constituent factors of this liberation and as matters inseparably related to it, religions invariably accept the existence of God, soul, heaven, hell, divinity of the prophet, infallibility of scriptures, value of faith and efficacy of the prescribed path in equipping the believer for the coveted liberation. The important characteristics of all these essential constituents of religion are that they are all empirically unverifiable. Every religion contains elements, which by their nature are unverifiable, whereas science mostly contains elements that are empirically verifiable. Thus in science faith is not at all necessary while in religion faith alone is necessary. Whereas in religion only believers gain and doubters perish, in science only the doubters flourish and the believers perish.

It is known psychological finding that in any knowledge situation the less the objective constraints the greater becomes the domination of subjective elements within it. This subjective element is of a wish-fulfilling and ego-satisfying nature. Since religion is a social phenomenon coming down from thousands of years, the subjective element dominant in it assumes not an

individual but a communal form and is based upon the respective scriptures. And then what is the result?

What any particular religion says is completely satisfactory to its followers while it is not at all satisfactory to the followers of other religions. In our present multi-religious world the 'we' element dominates the believers' thinking. The orthodox belief invariably takes the form of 'ours' and 'theirs'. A sort of 'onlyism' comes to dominate it, implying that only we are good and are the chosen ones of god. Every resident believer moves in the cosmopolitan world as a proud representative of the only religion that is absolutely satisfactory. Since his scriptures are perfect in every way he does not have to learn anything from anyone; he has only to teach others.

Scientific approach

Now just the opposite is the approach of scientists. They are humble and eager to learn. As days pass our scientific knowledge improves and hence the golden days of science are in the future while those of religion in the past. And, importantly, the question of satisfaction does not arise in science. What a scientist says is assessed on a true-false scale not a satisfactory-unsatisfactory scale. But, again, being satisfactory or not is decided in the religious sphere not in an impartial way but on the basis of who is saying it. If we are, then ipso facto it is a satisfactory and if they are, then ipso facto it is evil. All this ensues from the fact that sciences are intellectual pursuits while religions are emotionally satisfying pursuits. It appears as if science and religion inhabit two different worlds. The emotionally satisfying fantasy fortresses of religion are completely secure from what goes on in the empirical world. This is why scientific discoveries as such have no demolishing effect upon various religious beliefs.

So much so that if in science proofs create beliefs, in religion beliefs create proofs. The Jains will offer tens of grounds for dining only during the day while Muslim will offer an equal number of proofs for eating only during the night in the month of Ramzan. And none will yield even an inch of ground to the other. This does not happen in sciences. Scientists give up their beliefs if they are found to be false. Truth and beliefs also have a contrasting position in science and religion. If scientists believe (accept) whatever is true, religious people accept as true whatever they believe. This contrast owes its origin to the different ways in which we learn the two sets of beliefs.

Indoctrination of religion

We learn sciences when we are conscious learners, when we can discriminate between what is true and false and so on. We learn science deliberately; there is no indoctrination. By contrast, we learn religion right from our infancy, when we are too suggestible and are unable to discriminate and gather evidence to the contrary. There is a deliberate and comprehensive type of indoctrination. The whole process is carried on every day in the family, the neighborhood, the schools, in literature, in media, in cultural activities and so on. The superiority of one's own religion is so ardently preached that the believer is prepared to die or kill in the cause of his faith. Religion gradually becomes a lifestyle, a routine, a compulsion, and a mission. For religious people the transcendental is more real and better than the empirical. In their view it governs the empirical. Now this is not the case with the science and the scientists.

The teaching of scientific findings is not indoctrination. Science is not one-sided propaganda. Science does not become a routine, ritual, a compulsion or a mission. Science is not one more religion. Although orthodoxy has harassed, tortured and even killed many scientists, no scientist has ever retaliated in the spirit of a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye.

Who versus How

Science tries to explain events with the help of antecedent natural causes. If religion explains *who* does this act or that act, science tries to explain *how* the given events take place. If religion explains who makes the rainfall, science explains how the rain falls. Moreover, all over the world over, science is one while religions are many and function as a factor dividing humanity. Ancient man, with the help of religion fought against ferocious forces of nature. But now religion is making today 's men fight with each other. There is little hope of religious fanatics seeing reason because their outlook is not based upon reason. Since religion is based upon faith the phenomena of dogmatism, fanaticism, fundamentalism and terrorism invariably go with it but never with science.

Settlement of disputes

What about settlement of disputes? The arguments between two scientists are of a factual nature and can be settled by correcting each other's errors in assumptions, readings or procedures; but disputes between the followers of two different religions can never be settled since they are sentimental in nature. It works like this: If people in different countries claim that a particular river in their country is the longest river in the world, the dispute can be amicably and happily settled. But if persons claim that a particular river in their country is the most sacred river in the world, this dispute can never be settled. Religious agreements are of this type. Disputes

in science generate light without generating heat, whereas disputes between two religious people invariably generate heat without generating the light.

Religion promises miracles but it performs little; on the other hand science promises littler but performs miracles. It is a science and not religion that is making blind people see, lame people walk, and so on. Thanks to science, man can fly in air and see the things inside the earth. Take again the case of liberation; religion promises man liberation which no one can verify. But it is for anyone to see that science is substantially and increasingly liberating man from misery, drudgery, want, ignorance, superstition, diseases, deformities, etc. And most important of all, science has freed man from fatalism and diffidence. Man is now confident of his fate.

There are many more points of contrast. We will note just one. Since the belief is that the scriptures and religion are perfect in every way, they need no change. But the contents of science are changing every day. Anyone can see that in becoming unchanging religion presents obscurantist appearance while science is always the latest one. If religion by its fossil like appearance tells us how the various people once upon a time thought, science depicts how man is currently thinking.

To ask questions is the innate tendency of man and sciences are the result. To live as guided by a religious faith is to curb the questioning spirit of man. I quite accept that for a good life science alone is not enough and that many more things are necessary. Yet one thing is evident – by curbing the spirit of questioning, religion makes us intellectual dwarfs while encouraging the inquisitive spirit science helps man gain new heights in what is essentially human.

DD Bandiste

A VEIL OF DECEIT

The New Year Day dawned. The rest of the world was yet to wake up from the hang over of the previous evening, but in contrast to this there was intense activity near Karmad. Karmad is a small sleepy village on the Aurangabad – Jalna road. A close look at what was the cause of such a frenzied hurry bury amongst the simple, easy going locals, would have led you to a camp set up one Mallinath Maharaj.

Rumour spread that Mallinath Maharaj is an incarnation of the great Hindu god Mahadev. Innocent, guileless village folks came in large numbers to pay their obeisance to him. If the Lord Shiva himself had left his seat in the heaven and appeared at Karmad, shouldn't the people come and seek his blessings? To convince the congregation, Maharaj claimed that he would perform miracles, which only a god can do. Not only that, he staked his sincerity by saying that no one should touch his feet before he shows his feats. Of course, if a person is convinced that Maharaj were an incarnation of god, then Maharaj's blessings would come at a price!

To undo the efforts of Maharaj to swindle simple, poor and innocent people of their hard earned money, under the guise of Mahadev incarnate, ANS volunteers, decided remove the veil of deceit on Maharaj's face.

The volunteers set up another camp, a little before Maharaj's camp. They performed and displayed the same miracles – passing a needle through tongue, producing a long rope from the mouth, walking on fire, etc. – these were exactly like those Maharaj was demonstrating.

Village folks, on the way to seek blessings from Maharaj, first had a look at these demonstrations of miracles and then when they reached Maharaj's camp, were obviously disillusioned. They were convinced that Maharaj's tricks and miracles were nothing but sleight of hand. Maharaj's claim that he was incarnation of god and had descended from the heaven was not going down well with anyone now.

This obviously infuriated Mallinath Maharaj. The irate Maharaj, along with hoards of his obedient followers, set up another camp, up on a hill, under a lemon tree. The ANS volunteers announced to the locals that Mallinath's guru Pallinath has also arrived, so please do come in the evening and seek both their blessings. As people gathered, Pallinath, that is one ANS volunteer got up and confronted Mallinath Maharaj. The volunteers then enumerated to the gathering, the amount of land and wealth Maharaj had acquired from his followers by deceitful means.

ANS volunteered challenged Maharaj to prove that he can do miracles, in front of skeptics and people with knowledge of magic and sleight of hand. If he met the challenge then ANIS would reward him or otherwise Maharaj was bogus. If he were proved to be a charlatan, then Maharaj would be declared an enemy of society and legally booked.

Mallinath is yet to admit that he is wearing a veil of deceit. Hopefully time would tell the truth.

Navanath Pawar

IN SEARCH OF A GHOST!**Anil Kore**

When some one utters the word 'Ghost', it makes the listeners start shivering. Right from the childhood till old age, we are being haunted by this spooky concept of ghost. These ghost stories are quite popular among rural folks and generally there are some fantasies to which the storyteller adds value. Remote hamlets, ruined palaces, dilapidated houses, deserted streets, etc., are the main centers used by the vested interests to weave ghost stories and spread rumors to achieve their ulterior motives. A small village, Ambechichadi in Sholapur district, is just one example of such rumor-mongering about ghost-haunted places. In fact this village is a very prosperous village with fertile and irrigated land reaping mainly cash crops. However like any other village, this village also lacks most of the minimum infrastructure facilities like approach roads, sanitation, etc.

Yogesh Patil, a young man from this village, woke up shivering one night feeling that a ghost sat on his chest and started squeezing his neck. For a few seconds, he was not able to speak a single word. However he found that all his friends were in sound sleep and doors and windows were locked. He opened the door and found that a man, named Mujavar, was walking on the path. He asked him what time it was. Mujavar told him it was 4.30. He went back and slept. After waking he went on telling the experience to every one.

This was not the first time of ghost haunting experience in that village. A few days back, Gulab Kotwal also had similar experience except that this time there was a female walking with noisy sandals. Many people came forward relating such experiences of ghost haunting with some changes in minor details. Children, women and old people were caught in the grip of fear and refused come out during evening and late night. Whole village came to the conclusion that the ghost has haunted their village and it needed extra ordinary measures to bring it back to normal. The elders gathered together and discussed the matter. An aged man, Nizamudin Mujavar of Mujavar community related that this village is not offering milk and ghee to the village god for the last 15 years. That might be the main reason of the recent disaster. All villagers were ordered to offer milk and ghee to the village god on one particular day. Meanwhile some students contacted the nearest ANS unit at Mohol. The activists, Ishwar Pasare, Sudhakar Chavan, Kailas Kale decided to go to this village on the day when the offerings were made. However the lead man Mujavar came to know about the activists' arrival and on some pretext he cancelled the ceremony.

This time he convinced the villagers that he would invite a Phakeer who could manage to throw away the ghosts. 'Allah had blessed the village by sending this Phakeer' he said.

This time Mujavar took all precautions to prevent communicating to ANS unit about his line of attack. Though the Phakeer was there for three days, village elders were not able to make up their mind and agree to Mujavar's proposal. However on the same day a woman felt that a ghost has haunted her and ran out on the street and was sick for 36 hours. Mujavar convinced the village Sarpanch, Harappa Jadhav and other members and coerced them into bringing 150 coconuts, 150 lemons, 250 grams of 'Narakya ood', 5 m green cloth, etc. However Rajamane, a member of Gram panchayat, thought that ANS activists should be called on this occasion. He contacted the concerned activists and suggested to them that they be present on the day when the Phakeer is going to perform the ritual. Accordingly Ramesh Adlinge, Dharmaraj Chavare, Anil Kore, Adv Govind Patil, Sudhakar Kashid, DB Kalase, BR Jarag, Suryakant Bankar, Shivaji Vyavahare, etc., came in jeeps and found that the village was immersed in dark. By the time power was restored, the activists mixed with villagers and tried to find out the facts. They suggested that villagers who had experienced the ghost haunting should come forward and relate their experience. Except for Yogesh Patil, Gulab Kotwal and Malhari Londhe no one came forward. Their experience was recorded on the tape. In the end the activists called the Phakeer. He started telling that he never claimed that he would throw the ghosts. He also told that there are no ghosts in the world. Activists made him to write his statement. However his pal Nizam Chacha was not ready to pay heed to them. He insisted that the villagers themselves took the lead and he had no role to play. Sudhakar Kashid came out and gave a speech to the gathering and told all about the statements made by Phakeer, Nizam Chacha, and others. He also revealed a number of rumours, and fantasies of ghosts. He said that ghosts are the figment of imagination of weak minds and generally someone is behind these incidents. He warned that ANS would take strict action unless the concerned person stops the mischief and drag him to police station.

Activists felt that The Phakeer should not remain in the village. The Panchayat members took him on motorcycle. Meanwhile a police jeep was coming towards the village. The police inspector was told about the incidents and the Phakeer was handed over to police. Someone in the village might have had some affair. To hide the same he might have started the Ghost haunting rumors. The gullible were easy pray to such rumors. That may be the reason to invite the Phakeer. Alternately someone might be trying to make some profits out of the fear of the villagers.

GHOSTS HAUNT THE WHITE HOUSE TOO!

Washington: The White House at night is a dark and spooky place, haunted, according to legend, by ghosts of dead presidents and a former British soldier. It is a big old house and when the lights are out it is dark and quiet and any movement catches attention. President George W Bush has never reported seeing a ghost, but recent presidents have felt the presence of their predecessors. The presidents have indicated a feeling of the previous occupants and have all talked about drawing strength from the fact that the previous presidents lived here. The spookiest area of the White house is probably the president's living area. Every sound resounds through the halls.

The White House has long had a reputation for being haunted – most famously by the ghost of former president Abraham Lincoln. When the wife of president Woodrow Wilson wanted to dig up the rose garden, legend has it that the spirit of the former first lady Dolly Madison appeared and warned them not to disturb her garden.

There is a story of a British soldier who died in the White House grounds, in 1814 when the British burned the White House. It is said that some people have seen a British soldier with a torch in hand.

TOI News

GHOST: MEANS WHAT?

Ghost is a nonmaterial embodiment or essence of an organism, especially of a human being. The term is sometimes used virtually as a synonym for soul or spirit. More frequently, however, the term ghost is applied to an apparition, usually of a dead person, that varies in apparent solidity from a mere fog-like mass to a perfect replica of the person.

In many religions, and particularly in primitive faiths, the belief exists that the spirit wanders away from the body during periods of unconsciousness such as sleep. Such religions also teach that after death the spirit lingers near the body of the dead person. A common practice of groups holding such beliefs is to propitiate the ghosts of the dead by offerings of food, clothing, and other objects that the ghosts may find useful in the spirit world. In many primitive civilizations the personal possessions of a dead man, including his weapons, his pets, and sometimes even his wife, are buried or burned with his body. The practice of ancestor worship, as well as the mourning rites of many modern civilizations, probably has originated in the belief in ghosts.

Encyclopedia Encarta

CONFERENCE FOR THE AWAKENING OF ETHICAL VALUES IN SOCIETY

ANS organized a conference to Awaken and Highlight Ethical and Rational Values in Society, held on the 7 th and 8 th February in Mohol, district Solapur, which is a decisive progressive forward step for the work it is already doing in the field of superstition eradication. The Samiti is actively engaged in opposing superstitions and will continue to do so even in the future.

However along with this work, some important problems related to ethical and rational facets in social life were identified and an action-oriented program was initiated to tackle such problems during this conference. The sister organization " Vivek Vahini" working with the help of college lecturers and students, was the co organizer of this conference. The Minister for Higher Education in The Government of Maharashtra Honorable Shri Laxmanrao Dhoble was the president of the welcome committee of the conference. Nearly 1500 representatives from a 150 branches of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti and 125 branches of Vivek Vahini attended this conference.

Purpose of Conference

In the present times as un-ethical and irrational thinking and behavior is increasing in society it is also gaining unwarranted and undue respectability and acceptance in society. Because of which tremendous dread and arrogance for such type of behavior abounds in society. The conference wants to publicly proclaim and initiate an action program advocating that: Human beings if they so desire, can by insisting and adhering to their noble and ethical instincts, and creating a force of like-minded people can with determination create a noble (er) society. The novelty of this conference is that the resolutions adopted during the conference would be expected to be practiced by individuals in society; and it will be indicative as to direction to be taken for the joint efforts to be adopted for tackling problems related with ethical issues concerning society.

Resolutions

I will refrain from any type of addiction. I will see that any form of addiction does not receive unwarranted and undue prestige in society. I understand that my fight is against addiction and not against an addicted sick person.

This first resolution is of a personal nature and personal participation is expected. As far as the social aspect is concerned a petition to the government of Maharashtra will be made to make the government declare its intentions about formulation and implementation of policies to prevent and to end addiction in society. Also a white paper expounding the current situation of addiction in society will be tabled by expert doctors who are actively working in the field of di-addiction like Dr. Abhay Bung, Dr. Anil Awchat, etc

While realizing the ever increasing threat of AIDS it is best to refrain from premarital sex to gain momentary sexual gratification and to resolve personally to be loyal with ones marital partner.

In our society if one of the partners before marriage has AIDS then after marriage horrific consequences arise. Due to this not only the concerned two families are destroyed but also the AIDS affected population gets doubled. In this context the social obligation requires the resolution that AIDS test must be made compulsory before getting married.

I will insist to refrain from any form of violence under any circumstances.

Sections of the society that gets agitated due to family, cast or religious problems easily take resort to violent means. This is a very serious matter. The third resolution Taking into consideration the notorious inclination to violence in religious rivalry and to prevent this in the future it will be also resolved that: all individuals in society should be friend at least one individual belonging to another religion. Along with this, to prevent such violent incidents occurring between different communities a process will be initiated with the help of both the government and the people to form likeminded organisations.

Individuals should undertake to perform marriage and similar ceremonies in a simple manner.

Tremendous amount of money is blown up to celebrate religious festivals and social functions under the excuse of following ancient traditions, customs and conventions. Our poor and developing country cannot afford such unwarranted waste of money. This scarce money could easily be put to better use for the progress of the nation. To desist from this, the fourth resolution requires Along with this the social aspect of this resolution will include petitioning the government that religious customs like Kumbha Mela and Hajj pilgrimage should not be subsidized using taxpayers money.

Some prominent personalities participated and guided the participants attending this conference. Among them were Ms. Medha Patkar, leader of the Narmada Bachao movement, Dr. N.D. Patil, social leader, Dr. Shriram Lagu, Dr. Sudhir Panse, Director of University and College Development Department of The University of Mumbai, progressive writers and thinkers Dr. B. L. Bhole and Dr. Yashwant Sumant, Ms Vidya Bal, women's liberation activist, Dr. Hemu Adhikari, actor and scientist of BARC, Dr. Pradeep Patkar, renowned psychiatrist, Kamal Thakar, Principal, Ausa college, Laxmanrao Dhoble, Minister for Higher Education, Kisanrao Deshmukh, president, Vivek Jagar, etc.

Deepak Girme

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**Clear thinking and the forces of unreason**

There is a new need for rationality and reason as well as courage and resoluteness - in defense of freedom and democracy and highest values of civilization. The world has changed, and a previous pop culture of superficiality, self-absorption, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction has gone out the window with it. A several-decades period of relative innocence and naivete has ended. Things are serious now, and we need all our wits about us. Intelligence and wisdom are called for. Clear thinking is in; fuzzy thinking is out it is dangerous to all.

We have long advocated not just good science but an open, scientific outlook - a viewpoint that values an open-mindedness to new ideas, a determination to let facts and evidence rather than wishes and preconceptions and ideology shape our judgments, skepticism toward assertions unsupported by good evidence, wide open debate and communication and publication, and the application of critical analysis and judgment at every step of the process.

- Kendrick Frazier


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HOMAGE TO VM TARKUNDE: A GREAT HUMANIST

"Roy is vindicated, Hitler has attacked and invaded Soviet Union." shouted a young man entering 'Lucky' restaurant in Pune, where many Royists used to meet. It was June 1941. The Royists were passing through the most challenging period of their movement. Gandhiji and the Quit India Movement swayed the young generation in those days. Those like the Royists who did not participate in it were branded antinationalist. In this anti colonial and anti British atmosphere MN Roy courageously pleaded for strengthening the hands of the Allies in order to defeat the Axis Powers. He wanted Indian youth to participate in the war and help the allies in the 'Titanic War' against Fascism and Militarism. If the Axis Powers succeed, he thought, there was no hope whatsoever of freedom and independence for any people anywhere. The Indian National Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru and others under Mahatma Gandhi's influence, on the other hand, thought that India should help the Allies only as an independent and equal partner. It was the most appropriate and opportune time according to them to tell the British to quit India. The common people as well as these leaders were not aware of the global danger of Nazism and fascism even when the eastern Axis Powers were about to invade India. MN Roy however could clearly see the danger and knew that despite a No War Pact between Hitler and Stalin, Germany would invade Russia sooner than later and Russia would join the Allies to defeat the Axis powers. The fatigued and impoverished allies, although victorious, will no more be able to govern their colonies. Most of the colonies will then be free of their imperial rulers. This is exactly what happened when India became free shortly after World War II. In reality, the Quit India Movement was on the wane before the war was over and was certainly not the main cause that made the British leave India. They relinquished power because it had become impossible for them to hold on to their colonies. Late Achchutrao Patwardhan, a veteran freedom fighter in the Quit India Movement, honestly enough, admitted as much in his speech at the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Quit India Movement at the August Kranti Maidan. The Congress men and other like minded patriots who grab all the credit for making India free never tire of asking the Royists and other leftists, 'Where were you during the freedom struggle?'

The young man who was thrilled to announce Hitler's invasion of Russia was none other than VM Tarkunde. He did not participate in the Freedom Movement of 1942 not because of lack of patriotism or courage; but because he had seen the universal danger in Hitler and the Axis Powers. He strived for the freedom of Humanity throughout his long and well-lived life. Another challenging period in the life of Radical Humanists and other freedom lovers was the time when Mrs. Gandhi declared Emergency in 1975 and converted whole of India into a prison. Tarkunde and other Royists in co-operation with Jayprakash Narayan and the Chief Justice MC Chagla fought against it fearlessly. Tarkunde never asked, 'where are most of the freedom fighters of the 1940s?' because he was busy fighting the cases of those freedom loving people who were unjustly incarcerated by Indira Gandhi's henchmen under MISA; he fought their cases when other lawyers shied away out of fear of MISA or of foregoing other lucrative cases. He fought for Kuldeep Naiyar and won. He was busy giving vent to the atrocities committed by the Government on the Naxalites in the Andhra Pradesh. He was busy compiling a report of the committee that investigated into the repression of the reformist and progressive Boharis by the despotic Bohari priests. He was busy making a report on the reforms that are necessary in the rules and procedures of elections.

For all these tireless and valiant efforts, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) honored Tarkunde with the 'International Humanist' award at the IHEU World Congress in London in 1978. The Academy of Humanism, an American Institute too selected him as the Humanist Laureate of the Academy for his struggle for Human Rights and Civil Liberty, Freedom and Social Justice, in India and abroad.

He had seen rural life at close quarters even as a child and was very much alive to their exploitation. His advocate father too was dedicated to social service. As a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj his house was open to all the so-called low caste Hindus. So the Brahmins of Saswad, where he grew as a child, had ostracized the Tarkunde family. Thus he

learned to swim against the current right from his childhood. With his father's help and encouragement the Mali society of Sasawad founded a sugar factory. Bhausaheb, as VM Tarkunde was fondly called by his Royist associates, also wanted to serve the farmers and the common man in society. So after a very bright career in school, standing first in the matriculation examination, he opted for a course in agriculture and graduated as B.Sc. in agriculture (of course standing first). Agricultural reform in his opinion was a key to the nation's prosperity. Later he went to England to join the ICS but returned with a first class degree in Economics from the London School of Economics and also a Bar at Law. He was only 21 then. Returning to India he chose to practice at Pune and not at the Bombay High Court where he could have minted money. He chose Pune because he could pursue his political and social activities from there.

He joined the Congress Socialist Party with SM Joshi and did extensive social work in nearby villages. He became a member of the MPCC and was elected to represent Maharashtra at the AICC at Faizpur in 1938 defeating the venerable Shankarrao Deo. Those were the days when the Congress representatives were elected by ordinary members of that region and not nominated by the high command. As MN Roy initiated the 'League of Radical Congressmen' (within the Congress Party) after his release from jail, Bhausaheb joined him. Later in 1940 he left the Congress Party altogether as he differed from the party's outlook on the question of helping the Allies during the world war as said earlier. MN Roy then launched a new party, the 'Radical Democratic Party'. Bhausaheb gave up his practice as an advocate and became a full time member of this party in 1942. He was elected General Secretary in 1944.

However he had to start his practice again in the Bombay High Court in 1948. He was a righteous lawyer and stuck to his principles at all costs. He never appeared for the management but always for the labor. In 1957 he was made judge of the Bombay High Court. As a judge he proved himself a master of facts and a good purveyor of law. He was able to pick up the justice of the case quickly and not being a stickler about the letter of the law, administered justice according to the spirit of the law, when law would not favor facts of an individual case. From there he resigned in 1969 to become a senior advocate in the Supreme Court of India. As a faultlessly and consistently moral human being young lawyers and NGOs flocked to him wherever he went. He stopped working in the Supreme Court in 1999.

While in Delhi his political and social activities continued vigorously and on a broader canvas. He was President of the IRHA and also edited since 1970 the magazine 'Radical Humanist' that has gone through several metamorphoses since its inception by MN Roy as a weekly, called Independent India in 1937. Not only did Bhausaheb edit the magazine Radical Humanist but also wrote very thought-provoking articles and spent over Rs.15000 every month to support it. Because of him the magazine did not meet the same fate as did Gandhiji's Harijan after his assassination by a fanatic.

In 1974, JayPrakash Narayan founded 'Citizens For Democracy'. Bhausaheb was its General Secretary. When 'Peoples Union For Civil Liberties' was formed Bhausaheb was its elected president. A true democrat he was always open to conviction but committed to a humane democracy where principles would not play second fiddle to power. In recent times some Royists criticized him for befriending Muslim clerics. As a Radical Humanist he had little patience with the mumbo jumbo of religious rituals or priest craft of any faith but he felt it necessary to befriend Muslims to remove their prejudice against Hindus and their fear of their huge majority. He made a clear distinction between communalism and fundamentalism both of which are detrimental to democracy. However he thought fundamentalism is the lesser evil between the two. He consistently refused to join any political party, as he was never interested in power. He always maintained that one is not obliged to vote for any political party but should vote and vote for a candidate of integrity.

MN Roy and his associates had a vision of a truly democratic India. They were aware that our social structure and culture were still medieval based on social hierarchy and caste system. Our people were poor, unlettered and uneducated. In such a state of affairs an ideal constitution as drafted by the committee under Dr, Ambedkar is not the solution. To bring about a radical change in society requires educating the people and party politics to attain

power is simply unable to do it. That is why the radical party as a political party was dissolved and the Royists began working at the grass root level as an association of Radical Humanists. To achieve this change, People's Plans (I and II) for social and economic development were prepared by Royists like Gowardhan Parikh, VB Karnik, GR Dalvi, etc. Unfortunately after independence the License-Quota-Permit system and the Mega Projects succeeded in sidetracking efforts like the people's plans completely and our population by and large remained atomized and powerless, uneducated and superstitious. Bhausaheb wanted education that would create not only a discriminating electorate but teach people to live a co-operative life; education that would bring freedom, equality, reasoning, and self discipline to the people.

Bhausaheb had a well-built body, a strong constitution, a large heart, an all-pervading incisive intellect and was always prepared for sacrifice. People close to him say he had strong prejudices and did not stand any nonsense. That made it difficult for him to work in a team. He hated any special treatment given to him and loved to be treated as an ordinary member of the association during all the seminars, workshops, study camps and gatherings that he attended. He would get angry when people talked of retirement. Even when his health was deteriorating he wanted to go to villages. His optimism was innate and also 'a moral obligation', as Carl Popper had said in his 'Lessons of the 20th Century'.

During the last three years of his life he was almost confined to a wheel chair but remained perfectly agile mentally till the end. He wrote an open letter, as late as 25th Jan this year, to Atal Bihari Bajpei and General Parvez Musharraf, emphasizing the need for denuclearization and elimination of all existing nuclear weapons. He wanted an ongoing dialogue between the two countries because both India and Pakistan can ill afford this awe-inspiring luxury of being nuclear powers. Recently he advocated presidential form of government with several novel checks and balances. These thoughts of his are published as a booklet, titled as 'Concept of Humanist State' by the IRHA, Mumbai Branch. Till the end he spoke and wrote with great clarity of thought and in simple, easily understood language. He wrote for the people and not for academicians. Alas, we will never read or hear him again because Bhausaheb is no more amongst us. 'Thought and Action' ever remains grateful to this Humane Intellectual Giant.

Suman Oak

Calling India's Freethinkers

Murali Manohar Joshi has learned the hard way that astrology does not work after all. The will of the Indian voters has overturned the alignment of auspicious stars in the astrological charts of the BJP; just it has defied the numerology of pollsters.

Indian voters have thrown out the obscurantist –in chief and the party he represented. Even though most of the 370 million strong voters did not consciously set out to punish the BJP for its obscurantist cultural and educational policies, they have inadvertently created the conditions, where secularism has a second chance to succeed. This by itself is reason enough to cheer and hope.

But it is also time to reflect and reaffirm the role of rationalism in the Indian society. Sure, throwing out the peddlers of superstitions is no mean task. But harder still is the task of creating a society where superstitions lose their hold on the public imagination. Ridding the government of those who would freely and arbitrarily mix science and spirituality is undoubtedly a great achievement. But greater still is achieving a society that has internalized the principle of separation between science and spirituality. Without this deeper secularization of the cultural common sense of the Indian people, secularism will remain a shallow legalism, forever at the risk of a saffron take-over.

This is where intellectuals come in; the Indian voters have done their part, now the intellectuals must do theirs. Secular minded citizens, scientists, writers, intellectuals and the liberal, forward looking clergy of all faiths will have to join the battle for a deeper secularization of the Indian society. Scientists will have to step out of their laboratories and humanists will have to give up

their haughty disdain for modernity. Those left-inclined intellectuals seeking “third position” between wholesale Westernization and nostalgic traditionalism will have to get over their preoccupation with cleansing modern science of its Euro-centrism. It is time for a no-nonsense commitment to the much-trashed idea of “scientific temper”.

The objective of a genuine and sustainable secularization is not to denigrate the religious impulses of ordinary people – that would be foolish, because all societies need a sense of sacred in order to celebrate the rhythms of life and death. The purpose of secularization is not to hasten the disappearance of the sacred, but to keep it within the limits of reason. In the case of Hinduism, secularization must involve a critical engagement with those aspects of Hindu sacred teachings that their empirical claims regarding the presence of a disembodied spiritual element in nature “seen” in the mind’s eye by mystics and yogis.

The fact is that the people everywhere need a way to reconcile their faith with modern learning, driven by science and technology. Fundamentalists (and unfortunately, many postmodernist defenders of “alternative epistemologies” as well) offer one way of reconcile faith with science: they relativise science and, in effect, declare religious cosmologies to be a rational within their own assumptions, as modern science is within its own materialistic and Western (or Semitic) context. This road leads to Vedic sciences and the phony Hindutva slogans of “all truths being different only in the name.” Indian secularists have to offer a more honest way to reconcile Hinduism with modern science. They must refuse the cheap comforts of relativism. They must insist that all truths are not equal. In the name of respecting popular religiosity, they must not close their eyes to the glaring contradictions between what scientifically know about how nature really works, and what our sacred books, our gurus and our godmen preach.

The first challenge before Indian secularists is to carefully but firmly un-twine the wild and uncontrolled intertwining of science and spirituality that has been going on in Hinduism since the time Swami Vivekananda in the late 19th century. Public intellectuals, in collaboration with progressive scientists, will have to explain – over and over again, through demonstrations and argument – why modern science is not another name for the same truth known to our Vedic forefathers. Indeed, Indian secularists will have to challenge the deep-seated and self-serving habit of Hindu apologists to draw wild parallels and equivalence between just about any *Shloka* from the Vedas and the laws of quantum mechanics and other branches of modern science. The second challenge will be to bring what we know about the natural world through science to bear upon the cosmological assumptions of such “Vedic sciences” as astrology, *vaastu*, *Ayurveda*, *yagnas*, Vedic creationism, “consciousness studies”, and the like. Indian secularists must sow seeds of doubt in the popular imagination about these “sciences” so that the masses reject the worldview of Hindutva on rational grounds.

A principled insistence on drawing clear distinctions between science and religion is crucial in India because Hinduism maintains a grip on the worldly affairs by claiming to be “just another name” for science and reason. Hindu gurus and godmen stake their claim to extraordinary and extra-constitutional powers not by invoking God’s commandments or by literal reading of sacred book – such stratagems are easy to laugh off in this day and age. Hindu apologists instead stake a right to intervene in secular matters by claiming for Hinduism a rational and empirical “holistic” knowledge of the “higher” and “subtle” levels of the material world.

Indeed, even a cursory reading of the voluminous writings of Murali Manohar Joshi, KS Sudarshan (or any number of RSS ideologues), David Frawley, Subhash Kak, NS Rajaram and the host of other apologists associated with Ramkrishna Mission and Aurobindo Ashram can show that Hinduism’s unique “scientificity” constitutes the central dogma of Hindutva.

Hindutva ideologues stake their claims to make “Hindu India” into a “guru of nations” on the notion that only Hinduism is compatible with modern science, while all the “Semitic” faiths have proven false by modern science. Hindutva’s self-serving and entirely fallacious equation of Hinduism with modern science - Hindutva’s central dogma – can be summarized as follows:

Hindu Dharma is rooted in the eternal, holistic or non-mechanistic laws of nature discovered “in a flash” of insight by the “Vedic Aryans.” These laws have been affirmed by modern science and therefore, Hinduism is equally scientific. Because Hindus live in accord with a scientifically proven order of nature which unifies matter with higher levels of spirit, they are more rational and ecological as compared to those of Abrahamic faiths who derive their moral laws from an

imaginary supernatural being, and who treat nature as mere matter, devoid of spiritual meaning. Because Hinduism is so scientific there is no need for an Enlightenment style confrontation between faith and reason in India. To become truly and deeply scientific, Indians – must embrace the teachings of the Vedas and Vedanta.

It was this central dogma that gave Dr Joshi and his fellow travelers the chutzpah to install departments of Vedic Astrology in public universities, to pour taxpayers money into every superstition under the sun, and try to take over public institutions like IIMs and IITs.

It should now become the first order of business of Indian intellectuals to demolish this central dogma. We must demolish this dogma not because we do not want India to shine and prosper and take its rightful place in the community of nations. We must demolish this dogma because it is based upon false parallels and correspondences between modern science and Vedic metaphysics. We must demolish this dogma because it denies the existence of deeply oppressive superstitions, including the occult notion of the presence of consciousness in matter. And we must demolish this dogma because of its deeply Hindu and Aryan supremacist overtones.

This dogma can only be demolished by drawing clear distinctions between scientific evidence of religious and/or mystical experience. Clarifying what is science and what is superstition must become top priority of Indian freethinkers.

Meera Nanda
(Courtesy: HINDU)

Catholic Church's View on HIV

The Catholic Church is spreading the claim that condoms have holes in them that allow HIV through. This information is discouraging people in developing countries from using condoms, greatly increasing their chances of contracting the virus.

It is no secret that under Pope John Paul II the church has opposed any means of birth control other than rhythm method. In developing countries the church often tries to use its influence to block both sex education and access to contraceptives. In Kenya, where around a third of people are catholic and a fifth HIV – positive, it has publicly burned condoms.

Now a team from the respected BBC television series *Panorama* has discovered that the church is going even further. While making a programme on the effects of the pope's politics, the team visited Kenya, Nicaragua and the Philippines. They repeatedly heard the line that condoms have holes in them that allow HIV through, they told *New Scientist*.

When the team investigated, they were shocked to discover that this claim came directly from the Catholic Church. "Latex rubber from which condoms are made does have pores through which viral sized particles can squeeze through during intercourse. These facts must be brought to the attention of our people whenever the condom is being discussed," states a pamphlet on AIDS put out by Catholic bishops in Kenya.

That is not the scientific consensus. In 2000, experts assessed all the available evidence on condoms for the US National Institutes of Health and concluded that intact Latex condoms (those that do not leak water) are "essentially impregnable" to even the smallest sexually transmitted virus, hepatitis B.

Yet the claim that condoms have virus-sized holes is being promoted at the highest level. When asked if it was true, the president of Pontifical Council for the Family at the Vatican, Cardinal Alfonso Trujillo, said: "Yes, yes, because this is something that the scientific community accepts." When told that the world Health Organisation, for one, most emphatically does not accept this claim, his response was "Well, they are wrong."

Doctors and priests do agree on some things; condoms can never provide 100 percent protection, and abstinence or fidelity are the best ways to avoid contracting HIV. Studies suggest that, in practice, due to breaks leaks or slipping, condoms offer 85 percent protection against HIV.

Organizations like WHO nonetheless view them as the only practical way to reduce the spread of the disease. Yet many priests in Kenya are vehemently opposed, arguing that condoms spread HIV by promoting promiscuity.

The BBC team found clear evidence that this policy was helping the disease to spread. "I can remember my headmaster trying to tell us about the condom but... the priest was saying that the condom is not good for people," says Eunice Atieno, one of the women who attended the Teenage Mothers association of Kenya. "If I could have had enough information, I could not have contracted the virus."

Courtesy: *New Scientist* /11 Oct 03

Is Faith Healing Real, Virtual Or Fraud?

American evangelist Benny Hinn is a controversial miracle man and a faith healer. He was invited by Gul Kripalani, head of the Indian Merchants Chamber and the Chairman of the Organizing Committee, to pray for and bless India. Is India facing any political or economical catastrophic crisis that needs blessing and praying by an imported holy man? Is there any shortage of our own holy men to pray and bless India that we have to import an holy man? Even the Catholic Church had advised its followers not to participate in this public rally. The archbishop of Mumbai, Cardinal Ivan Dias, former Vatican diplomat sent a circular to 116 parishes in Mumbai when news of Hinn's prayer meet was known. The editor of the catholic weekly, Examiner warned against the "media hype of a mega faith healing event to be held in Mumbai. *Bajrang Dal* and *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* also objected to this rally. A social worker of Mumbai, Bhagwanji Raini of *Janhit Manch* filed a PIL writ petition – before the proposed dates of the rally – requesting the Police Commissioner of Mumbai to ban the rally. But all efforts were in vain. The rally was held and attended by more than a million people including the Christians and the non-Christians. Now the matter may be with the judiciary court to know why the people did not take timely action as the faith healing can be considered as a legal offense under the Drugs and Remedies Act (objectionable advertisement).

Before exposing the hoax of Hinn, it would be proper to know his true identity. According to Mr. Kripalani he "encountered the Lord 22 years ago" Does it mean that he equates Hinn with God! Or Prophet? Hinn claims that God first appeared to him when he was 11 years old and has been appearing to him ever since. He boasts that he has a direct hot line with God! But Father Fernandez says that he often misquotes and misinterprets scripture. He has made incorrect prophecies and his alleged visions of angel's, communication with the dead and exaggerated claims for healing all go against teaching of Christianity. He has predicted that God will destroy homosexuals in 1995 but still they are kicking, kissing and enjoying homosexuality. U.S journalists on TV shows have questioned Hinn's healings.

According to press reports, the faith healer asked the people who had attended the rally to hold their hand on the part of the body, which was sick. Then he commanded "Demons of sickness of cancer arthritis, blindness (even death)! To Go' in the name of God. Then he requested to those who were instantly cured of their diseases to come on the stage. Believe it or not a woman walked up to the stage with a helper carrying the wheelchair. She said that she was paralyzed before the prayer and faith healing. Now she had for the first time after paralysis walked on her own legs due to Hinn's faith healing! Another lady claimed that her hands were swollen before the prayer but now the swelling has gone! Another woman confirmed that deafness in her left ear since 1998 is cured and she can hear with her left ear also. There may be many more stage-managed miraculous cures. Before revealing the secrets behind such concocted stories, it would be proper to know what the experts in the medicine and psychiatry profession say about faith healing. They say that there is no evidence whatsoever to prove physical illness can be cured by faith healing. At the most faith healing can be described as placebo. Placebo effect can make a patient feel good for the time being due to the influence of self-hypnosis or autosuggestions, but it cannot cure any disease for good. The symptoms of

psychosomatic illness such as hysterical blindness may be temporarily disappearing. The psychiatrists say that in an extraordinary situation or highly motivated mental condition or a threat to his/her life, a totally paralyzed person may be able to walk a few steps but categorically state without any reservation that a genuine physical or neurological illness can never be healed by faith healing. That is why the experts of medicine and neuropsychiatry are never invited to witness faith-healing sessions. The organisers shunned the journalists to meet the faith healer Hinn under the pretension that he is occupied with prayer and meditation of 8 hours in a day! As a matter of fact, had he dared to meet the journalists or rationalists, they would have asked him very embarrassing questions and ripped open his hoax? Couple of years ago, another faith healer had organised a public demonstration of his divine power in Kolkata. A paralyzed man holding crutch in his armpit came near the healer who put his hand on his head and the patient threw away his crutch and walked away on his legs!. Unfortunately for the faith healer and patient, there were some rationalists in the gathering who knew the patient who claimed to have been cured instantly by the faith healer. He was not a paralyzed person but a quite healthy person. He was paid to pretend to be paralyzed person. They asked the police to arrest him for cheating the public. While the police were interrogating him, the faith healer ran away from the meet to escape arrest by the police.

Our *deshi* faith healer Dunderpurwala also practices divine healing. He claims that he can cleanse the blocked arteries of heart or remove the kidney stones just by his bare hands without using any sharp tools for operation. He even shows to his patients the stones he has removed from his kidney, how? Quite simple. An operation table is laid in advance on which operation is to be performed. Under the sheets of the bed, kidney stone sized stones and a tube of tomato sauce is concealed. A patient's whole body is covered with another sheet. The healer pretends to chant some mantras and then puts his hands under the sheet. He makes some movements of his hands to show to the persons who are witnessing that operation is being done. After a few minutes he takes out his hands out of the sheet with kidney stone and his hands wet with the patients blood!

Hinn might have used the same gimmicks for his instant cures. Let any investigating journalist find out the names and addresses of those persons who had claimed to be cured instantly by faith healing process during 3 days sessions. If at all, there is even an iota of truth behind.

The claim of efficacy of faith healing process, the miracle man and faith healer Benny Hinn should demonstrate his divine power in the American hospitals by curing all the patients of their diseases by faith healing. That would save the patients from agony pains and medical expense. There would be no need for any hospitals and clinics as the faith healing gifted by God will be available free too all. American sceptic James Randy is offering 1 million dollars to any body who can prove his/her divine –miraculous powers in any human activities. In India rationalists organisations also offer Lakhs of Rupees to any person who can prove his miraculous talent. But alas, so far no miracle man or faith healer has accepted the challenge.

Laxmidas Khatau

A Girl Child in Service of God?

This is a story of an eight-year-old girl from Madhya Pradesh. Her parents brought her to a suburb of Mumbai, namely Malad, and donated her away to an organization that claimed to be in the service of god. The events that culminated in such a donation were very suspicious. The alert volunteers of a child help-line lodged a complaint to the police regarding this matter.

The eight-year old girl, Priyal, was the first daughter of Santosh Kumar Bagrecha of Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh. The parents gave a written affidavit to the police that when Priyal was barely six or seven years old, she started attending discourses by one guru – Guru Nirmal Maharaj. They stated that she got influenced by these discourses and was completely drawn into spiritual life. It was out her own will that Priyal decided to become an ascetic and lead a life of a Jain *sadhvi*.

The volunteers of the child help-line soon raised a few pointed questions about how a child is 'allowed' to take her own decision. Constitutionally, a person is not considered to be an adult, capable of taking a responsible decision, till he or she has completed eighteen years. And even if Priyal has consulted her parents about her choice of leading her own life, yet it is the responsibility of the parents and guardians to prevent her from taking such a step. They could wait till the child has grown up to be an adult, before allowing the child to take such a drastic step – to be an ascetic for the service of god. If the law of the land does not state it so clearly, then there is a need to rewrite and reword the law clearly.

The child helpline volunteers have stated openly that they do not wish to interfere with any religious aspect of the events. All they were concerned about was the welfare of such a young, eight-year old child, that too a girl child. In their complaint to the police the volunteers have emphasized the fact that under the garb of tradition and religion, a child should not fall prey to exploitations.

Priyal was donated away to the service of god in a public religious ceremony held in a park in Malad. On the day, Priyal was running a high fever and probably was oblivious to all the religious proceedings that were taking place.

Her parents were proud that Priyal was going from place to place, on foot, with her guru, preaching and teaching the religion. Her parents bragged that Priyal was now tonsured and made bare headed. She now drapes only a white sari. This made her look a perfect *sadhvi*. Not only this, continued her 'proud' parents, the worldly clothes that Priyal was wearing before she donned her white sari, was auctioned off and fetched a very high price. All this went to prove that their daughter was indeed blessed and was totally committed to the service of god. Hence forward, their daughter would lead a life of a bachelor and obey her guru, wherever he went.

Alarmed at the sequence of events, local ANS volunteers questioned Priyal's parents. "Which parent would not want a child's well being and happiness?" was the reply. The parents went on to say that after their second daughter grows up, they themselves will renounce all worldly comforts and become ascetics. The ANS volunteers persisted and queried as to why did they allow their own daughter to become an ascetic at such a young age, when they themselves have enjoyed a family life? To this, their reply was, "Priyal's wishes were to have a better life when she is reborn. She aims that if she becomes a *sadhvi* in this life, in the next life she will achieve total enlightenment and salvation. Neither Priyal nor we ever sent to school, our education is at the feet of our guru. The preaching and teaching from our guru is more than enough of our lives."

The Malad police took a stand of not looking into peoples' religious sensitivities. They dilly dallied by initially wanting to find out the proper legal section under which this crime could be lodged, then tried to postpone the issue by requesting the ANS volunteers to lodge their complaint in writing. The child help-line volunteers have vowed that they will continue to pressurize public opinion, the police and take all the necessary actions to keep the tempo of protests high. They do not want any child, especially a girl child, to be offered to any service of god. They are suspicious that it is service of guru and not service of god.

Sanjay Savrkar

Disturbing Statistics

At the beginning of the 20th century, the father of modern science fiction, HG Wells, said in his writings on politics, "If we want to have an educated citizenship in a modern technological society, we need to teach them three things: reading, writing, and statistical thinking." At the beginning of the 21st century, how far have we gotten with this program? In our society, we teach most citizens reading and writing from the time they are children, but not statistical thinking. John Alan Paulos has called this phenomenon innumeracy.

There are many stories documenting this problem. For instance, there was the weather forecaster, which announced on TV that if the probability that it will rain on Saturday is 50 percent and the probability that it will rain on Sunday is 50 percent, the probability that it will rain over the weekend is 100 percent. In another recent case reported by New Scientist, an inspector in the Food and Drug Administration visited a restaurant in Salt Lake City famous for

its quiches made from four fresh eggs. She told the owner that according to FDA research, every fourth egg has salmonella bacteria, so the restaurant should only use three eggs in a quiche. We can laugh about these examples because we easily understand the mistakes involved, but there are more serious issues. When it comes to medical and legal issues, we need exactly the kind of education that HG. Wells was asking for, and we haven't gotten it.

What interests me is the question of how humans learn to live with uncertainty. Before the scientific revolution, determinism was a strong ideal. Religion brought about a denial of uncertainty, and many people knew that their kin or their race was exactly the one that God had favored. They also thought they were entitled to get rid of competing ideas and the people that propagated them. How does a society change from this condition into one in which we understand that there is this fundamental uncertainty? How do we avoid the illusion of certainty to produce the understanding that everything, whether it be a medical test or deciding on the best cure for a particular kind of cancer, has a fundamental element of uncertainty?

For instance, I've worked with physicians and physician-patient associations to try to teach the acceptance of uncertainty and the reasonable way to deal with it. Take HIV testing as an example. Brochures published by the Department of Health say that testing positive for HIV means that you have the virus. Thus, if you are an average person who is not in a particular risk group but test positive for HIV, this might lead you to choose to commit suicide, or do something else quite drastic. But AIDS information in many countries is running on the illusion of certainty. The actual situation is rather like this: If you have about 10,000 people who are in no risk group, one of them will have the virus, and will test positive with practical certainty. Among the other 9999, another one will test positive, but it's a false positive. In this case we have two who test positive, although only one of them actually has the virus. Knowing about these very simple things can prevent serious disasters, of which there is unfortunately a record.

Still, medical societies, individual doctors, and individual patients either produce the illusion of certainty or want it. Everyone knows Benjamin Franklin's adage that there is nothing certain in this world except death and taxes, but the doctors I interviewed tell me something different. They say, "If I would tell my patients what we don't know, they would get very nervous, so it's better not to tell them." Thus, this is one important area in which there is a need to get people - including individual doctors or lawyers in court - to be mature citizens and to help them understand and communicate risks.

Representation of information is important. In the case of many so-called cognitive illusions, the problem results from difficulties that arise from getting along with probabilities. The problem largely disappears the moment you give the person the information in natural frequencies. You basically put the mind back in a situation where it's much easier to understand these probabilities. We can prove that natural frequencies can facilitate actual computations, and have known for a long time that representations - whether they be probabilities, frequencies or odds - have an impact on the human mind. There are very few theories about how this works.

I'll give you a couple of examples relating to medical care. In the US and many European countries, women who are 40 years old are told to participate in mammography screening. Say that a woman takes her first mammogram and it comes out positive. She might ask the physician, "What does that mean? Do I have breast cancer? Or are my chances of having it 99%, 95%, or 90% or only 50%? What do we know at this point?" I have put the same question to radiologists who have done mammography screening for 20 or 25 years, including chiefs of departments. A third said they would tell this woman that, given a positive mammogram, her chance of having breast cancer is 90%.

However, what happens when they get additional relevant information? The chance that a woman in this age group has cancer is roughly 1%. If a woman has breast cancer, the probability that she will test positive on a mammogram is 90%. If a woman does not have breast cancer, the probability that she nevertheless tests positive is some 9%. In technical terms, you have a base rate of 1%, a sensitivity or hit rate of 90%, and a false positive rate of about 9%. So, how do you answer this woman who's just tested positive for cancer? As I just said, about a third of the physicians thinks it's 90%, another third thinks the answer should be something between 50% and 80%, and another third thinks the answer is between 1% and 10%. Again, these are professionals with many years of experience. It's hard to imagine a larger variability in

physicians' judgments - between 1% and 90% - and if patients knew about this variability, they would not be very happy. This situation is typical of what we know from laboratory experiments: namely, that when people encounter probabilities - which are technically conditional probabilities - their minds are clouded when they try to make an inference.

What we do is to teach these physicians tools that change the representation so that they can see through the problem. We don't send them to a statistics course, since they wouldn't have the time to go in the first place, and most likely they wouldn't understand it because they would be taught probabilities again. But how can we help them to understand the situation?

Let's change the representation using natural frequencies, as if the physician would have observed these patients him - or herself. One can communicate the same information in the following, much more simple way. Think about 100 women. One of them has breast cancer. This was the 1%. She likely tests positive; that's the 90%. Out of 99 who do not have breast cancer another 9 or 10 will test positive. So we have one in 9 or 10 who tests positive. How many of them actually has cancer? One out of ten! That's not 90%, that's not 50%, that's one out of ten.

Here we have a method that enables physicians to see through the fog just by changing the representation, turning their innumeracy into insight. Many of these physicians have carried this innumeracy around for decades and have tried to hide it. When we interview them, they obviously admit it, saying, "I don't know what to do with these numbers. I always confuse these things." Here we have a chance to use very simple tools to help those patients and physicians to understand what the risks are and which enable them to have a reasonable reaction to what to do. If you take the perspective of a patient—that this test means that there is a 90% chance you have cancer—you can imagine what emotions set in, emotions that do not help her to reason the right way. But informing her that only one out of ten women who tests positive actually has cancer would help her to have a cooler attitude and to make more reasonable decisions.

Gerd Gigerenzer
(Courtesy: Edge)

Sacrificial Lamb

The story is situated at Dongergaon is a small village in Latur district. A couple here was married for more than nine years, and were keen to start a family. Numerous visits to godmen and other bogus sadhus led to no results (obviously!), despite spending money for seeking their blessings. Then good reason dawned on the pair and they sought professional medical advice. Tests showed that the couple would never bear children due to problems with the husband.

They were dejected and despondent. The wife was desperate to be a mother and nurture her children. To overcome the husband's handicap, she decided to liaise outside her marriage. Eventually she became an expectant mother. When this news reached her husband's ears, he was livid with rage. The wife had pushed her boundaries a bit too far. He started ill treating her, beating and abusing her.

Now how does an expectant mother get the courage and strength to face this treatment meted out to her by her own husband? In the eyes of society, he was the father of the child to be. He was her protector and the main breadwinner of the household. What ploys could she adopt to protect herself? She resorted to the trick of pretending to be possessed by some evil spirit. Whenever she felt threatened by her husband, she would get into a severe psychic frenzy, shout and scream, so that the neighbours and other community members would hear the alarm and come to her rescue.

Few Sadhu Babas were called and consulted as to why this was happening. After decamping the husband of some large amounts of money and melodramatically performing *Poojas* and chanting *Shlokas*, they come to a conclusion. They were sure that the lady gets into frenzy because someone is practicing the age-old ritual of "Bhanamati." Apparently, when a person known as Bhanamati, wishes ill of another person, the said person starts behaving erratically.

They even identified the Bhanamati to be a person living in a near by village. The Sadhu Babas even claimed that the Bhanamati was into black magic and had buried black dolls with pins and needles in the forest.

The innocent villagers were taken in by this story. They were convinced that Bhanamati would cause trouble in their lives too. To win the confidence of villagers, the *Sadhu Babas* took them to the place where they predicted that black dolls were buried in the forest.

After the dolls were found, the irate villagers chased after Bhanamati. When this news reached the local ANS volunteers, they came to the rescue of the helpless person named as Bhanamati. They explained to the villagers what exactly was happening with the expectant lady, her husband, Bhanamati and what the *Sadhu Babas* were up to. They advised that the lady and her husband be taken to a psychiatrist or a counselor and the family matter be resolved peacefully and amicably. The volunteers showed that it was futile to name someone fictional as Bhanamati and make that person a sacrificial lamb in a socially or domestically awkward, uncomfortable situation.

Ganesh Korade

Marks of a Mask

We do live in the twenty-first century, is it not? Blinking of computer screens, benefits of technology which touch every aspects of our lives, ringing mobiles in our pockets, electronic voting machines – all give us a proof that we, do indeed, live in the twentieth century. But if you observe the anachronistic events occurring within our society, you will doubt the fact that this is the twenty-first century. You will find some self appointed 'Gajanan Maharaj,' some self proclaimed 'Narendra Maharaj,' some claiming to be an incarnation of 'Satya Sai Baba.' There are innumerable such specimens who claim to have divine powers are nothing but frauds whose only aim is to de-pocket innocent people. In return for their advice and instructions (from above), they become financially rich and lead a comfortable cushy life. The truth is that these frauds exploit the blind faith of innocent victims, victims who are in need of correct guidance and professional counseling. In Maharashtra, there is no dearth of such pretentious Sadhu Babas. They knew the marks of a mask.

The story recounted below, is way out of step with time; it will probably give you mighty jolt, when you know that such things are happening even today! The story opens with a Paigambar Shiekh, a self-proclaimed Sadhu Baba, in a village named Mundhewadi near Pandharpur. A timely intervention in, addition to methodical approach, of the local ANIS volunteers from Karkamb and Mohol, led to unmasking of Paigambar Shiekh, the an ordinary crook in disguise.

A little investigation of Paigambar Shiekh unearthed the fact that this Paigambar Shiekh had taken his education only up to the first year of college. Then, unable to proceed with his education, he worked as an ordinary labourer in the local pomegranate orchards. The young chap became wayward, started drinking and womanizing. Unable to finance his vices, he started borrowing heavily from local moneylenders. He started drowning in his own debt. Soon he took other means of obtaining money – he would take the pomegranate produce from the farmers and sell them without giving back the farmers their share of money. Over time, his habits of embezzlement came to light. The moneylenders and farmers started putting pressure on him to return their money. What was the way out for a wayward, dishonest person, full of vices? Paigambar Shiekh took to heels and fled his village.

For Paigambar Shiekh, fleeing his village was not the end of his problems. What means could he identify to sustain himself? He thought of an easy plan to make money. He roamed around in the nearby villages and started spreading word that he was blessed by none other than god Dutta and has thus acquired divine powers. Initially about 15 to 20 innocent people fell for this hard sell by Paigambar Shiekh. By this time, Mr. Paigambar Shiekh has grown his hair in long, entangled locks, started wearing saffron coloured clothes, and looked pretty much a Sadhu Baba. His mask was complete.

With this disguise, Paigambar Shiekh returned to his village Mundhewadi. He selected a convenient spot to spread his brand of divine powers. With his 'disciples' he would give long discourse and pretend to solve peoples' problems.

In the intervening time, Paigambar Shiekh's wife passed away. To find another wife, he spun a convincing story to his in-laws. He claimed that three days after his wife took her journey to the heavenly abode, a cobra appeared in his house. The cobra had raised his head and was hissing angrily. Paigambar Shiekh realized that the cobra was a reincarnation of his wife and was angry with him for not proposing to her younger sister. Paigambar Shiekh folded his hands in front of the cobra and begged his wife, now in the form of cobra, not to be angry with him; he promised her that he would marry his sister-in-law. Apparently after this, the cobra went away quietly. On hearing this, his innocent in-laws could do nothing but give the hand of their second daughter, to Paigambar Shiekh, in marriage.

Thus Paigambar Shiekh, established as a Sadhu Baba, held his court, with his disciples, in his chosen convenient spot in Mundhewadi, every Thursdays and Sundays. Each believer had to pay twenty rupees to seek advice. Innocent people who were facing problems came to him for solution. The problems had a wide range - not being able to arrange a suitable match, not being able to conceive children, suffering from bile or even AIDS, being afflicted by ghosts, enemies cursing them by using a process called '*karni*,' de-addiction methods, divining methods for locating water below the ground, etc. One had to see to believe the long queues that formed every Thursdays and Sundays, of people eager to seek solutions to their life's problems from Paigambar Shiekh.

Besides the twenty rupees fee for an advice, people were encouraged to give donations from rupees hundred to about five to six thousand rupees. When people realized that their problems were NOT being solved, by the advice of this Sadhu Baba named Paigambar Shiekh, they started complaining. Some even lodged their protests to the local ANS volunteers.

To unmask the disguise of this fraudulent person, the volunteers hedged a plan. A local volunteer pretended to Paigambar Shiekh that on each new moon day he becomes nervous and suffers from bile problems. On hearing his complaint, Paigambar Shiekh chanted some holy verses for about ten or fifteen minutes. After this he informed the volunteer that some of his enemies had wished ill for him ('*karni*') and hence he was suffering on each new moon day. Paigambar Shiekh claimed that with his divine powers, he has identified who is doing this '*karni*;' within two months he will ensure that this person doing '*karni*' will flee. In the meantime, Paigambar Shiekh continued, the bile trouble would eventually go away. To convince the volunteer of his divine powers, Paigambar Shiekh, went on to boast that his abilities to cure illnesses such as bile and AIDS. Doctors in a hospital in Sholapur, namely the Wadia Hospital, were so impressed by Paigambar Shiekh's curing powers, that when the doctors were unable to cure patients with AIDS, they had invited him over. With his secret cures and divine powers, Paigambar Shiekh had brought back four to five persons in throes of death. To get over the bile problems, he even had a formula, which even professional doctors borrow from him. He asked the volunteer to be present during the prayers the following Sunday, when he would give him the cure for bile. "But in the meantime", Paigambar Shiekh went on, "a woman may come in your dreams this week and abuse you profusely. This may disturb you. To maintain your cool, take this divine powder pouch. Take a spoonful of this powder every morning and evening."

While all this was happening around Paigambar Shiekh, another local ANS activists started making investigations of Paigambar's background. In amongst all that he found, as narrated before, he also obtained another interesting piece of information. Apparently when Paigambar Shiekh's father was ill, he was taken to a professional doctor and did not take any so called cures from his own son! As the investigation continued, it came to light that all the eight places where Paigambar Shiekh had located underground water, the bore wells had not been able to pump any water at all. About 70% of people who knew Paigambar's previous past had called all that he was doing as utter bluff. Among other things that were unearthed, it was found that he would stay days with disciple, free of cost, he would charge heavily for divining water underground, etc. Once, a married ANS activist visited Paigambar Shiekh and requested him to predict when he would marry. After a few calculations, Paigambar Shiekh declared that he would be married between 24th of February and 14th of March. To be calm and composed and

not to be worried about his marriage, Paigambar Shiekh offered the ANS activist a small pouch of divine powder.

As more and more episodes came to light, it was clear to all that Paigambar Shiekh was a complete fraud. A plan was in place to catch this person red handed. All the local ANS volunteers kept Paigambar Shiekh busy by presenting him their own problems. Paigambar Shiekh did not get a whiff of what was happening outside his area; otherwise probably he would have fled! On one afternoon, many ANS volunteers from Karkamb and Mohol descended on Mundhewadi. Paigambar Shiekh was busy administering his brand of cure to a person, who was none other than an ANS volunteer. When Paigambar Shiekh saw that all the 'disciple' sitting in front of him and all the others visiting him now were ANS members, he knew his disguise out. Without much melodrama, he surrendered and admitted to everything. He openly admitted that he had no cure for bile or AIDS, he could not divine water from underground, etc. Paigambar Shiekh gave in writing all his misdemeanors and frauds that he had committed for so many years. In the end, he was relieved that he was not booked with criminal charged. This incredible story ended when the local villagers thanked the ANS volunteers for their good work. They acknowledged that because of the ANS activities, they were spared a Sadhu Baba.

Europe Debates its Faith

Unlike the United States, with its "In God We Trust" engravings on coins and in courtrooms, its Washington prayer breakfasts and various other religious ceremonies in public life, most countries of Europe pretty much keep religious rituals outside of the rituals of government. This seems consistent with recent survey findings that show Europeans less religiously observant than Americans and uneasy about a U.S. foreign policy that they see as driven by a sort of messianic zeal that is dangerous precisely because its inspiration is matter of faith.

It may come as something of a surprise, then, that added to all the other divisions bedeviling what is called the European project are disputes over whether God and Christianity ought to be inserted into the draft of the European constitution, from which both are now excluded.

The difference of view has to do with the constitution that will eventually be adopted to govern the European Union after it expands from its current 15 members to 25 members next spring. For more than a year, a 105-member committee, under the direction of the former French President, Valeri Giscard d'Estaing, worked on a draft to be adopted, or not adopted by the member-nations.

In truth, the lengthy draft, which was completed and presented to members early in October, is a verbose document devoted mostly to determining new bureaucratic arrangements like the number of commissioners on the governing body and their nationalities. The document's preamble, which is not a masterpiece of European literature, is intended to enumerate the values adhered to by all the component parts of the European Union, and it is over those first few paragraphs of the constitution that the debate on God and religion is centered.

As it now reads, the key sentence of the preamble is the one that define Europe as "civilization" whose inhabitants "have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason". The only mention of religion at all in the preamble comes in the next sentence, which mentions the "cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe," an inheritance that has led to the "central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights."

Even that ever so brief recognition of the religious heritage of Europe was a last minute addition inserted by the drafters after they decided to delete an earlier specific reference to Christianity. That was part of a larger compromise in which drafters also dropped mentions of Greco-Roman civilization and the Enlightenment as aspects of the common European heritage, phrases that suggest the secular philosophical foundations of European civilization. But the attempt to leave out both the Enlightenment and Christianity left many members of the various national delegations unsatisfied.

What are the two sides? In one camp are the mostly Catholic countries. Ireland, Spain, Italy and Poland, which, urged on by the Vatican, have been most active in demanding a more emphatic

recognition of Europe's religious roots. They are joined by other countries including Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Malta and Lithuania, all due to enter the European Union, which support a Christian or Judeo-Christian reference in the preamble.

"Either Europe is a Christian or it is not Europe." Was the bolt formulation in a headline in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* a few weeks ago.

On the other side is a conviction held most tenaciously by France and Belgium, which have perhaps the fiercest attachments to the idea of total church-state separation. It is quite simply that religion does not belong in the fundamental governing document of an association of European countries.

This seems to be what president Jacques Chirac had in mind when, speaking at European summit meeting, he said "In France all are free to believe and practice their religion. Or they can choose not to believe. There should be no favoritism in religion."

Ultimately the question is how best to give expression to European diversity even while giving a common identity to 25 countries with different traditions and histories. Clearly, the concept of "humanism" was central to that identity in the minds of constitution's drafters, though in the end, to accommodate demands for an acknowledgement of the religious heritage, they did put in that single phrase about "the cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe."

"For us that was already a compromise," said Stefaan Rynck, spokesman for the Commission on Institutional Reform of the European Union. "We wanted a general reference so as not to exclude any particular religious heritage."

But there seems plenty of support in Europe for a specific mention of Christianity, or the Judeo-Christian tradition, or even Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage of Europe. Certainly at least some on the pro-religion side of issue have voiced support for including all three of the major religious as a gesture of inclusiveness.

Supported by Belgium and Britain, France reaffirmed its rejection of references to god and religion in the draft EU-Constitution. In a new session of negotiations, the 25 foreign ministers of the European Union are trying to overcome their differences on the role of religion.

God had been successfully kept out of the preamble and the article on European values, till Poland, Italy, Portugal, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia and the Czech Republic made a fresh attempt to press for the Pope-line. The foreign ministers of these countries have demanded to "recognize the historical truth" by paying "further attention to a reference to the Christian roots of Europe". Germany, in respect to the god reference in its own constitution, joined the pious fraction. So far, the disputed part of the preamble reads: "The European Union draws inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist heritage of Europe".

The traditional god-lobby in the EU has recently been strengthened by some of the ten new member states. Most of them are strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, which encouraged and promoted their entry in order to increase its stake in the EU. Turkey, on the other hand, has been refused the entry for now, after it disturbed the "Christian Club" by demanding equal positions for Islam and Judaism, if there had to be references to religion at all. Besides disputes regarding direct references, there is still the controversial Article 51 in the draft, which defines the "status of churches and non-confessional organizations". Secularists want this article to be cut without substitute. Though already watered down from its original version, it still protects national privileges of the churches and grants them on Union level the privilege of extraordinary representation as regular dialogue partner of EU institutions (though dialogue "with all parties of civil society" is already subject of Article 46). As a result of long fights, the status of the Christian churches has been formally equated with the status of (other) "religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organizations".

Courtesy: *The Hindu & Rationalist*

Orissa Offices Come Under Ganesha's Protection

When man fails, it takes divine intervention – even if it's simply to protect floors and walls in Orissa offices from the blood red darts that betel leaf chewers spit out! Standing at the corner on each landing of a staircase at the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO)

complex here is a statue of Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god. It is his presence that, in the past three months, has kept betel chewers from using the floors and walls as a spittoon.

"The walls had virtually turned red with a large number of employees spitting *paan* (a leaf-wrapped preparation containing betel nuts and lime) after chewing it," IDCO official AK Mohanty said. "We tried to prevent this by placing notices on the walls but it did not work. Even placing spittoons at strategic places did not help," he added. "So, after cleaning the places where people spit more often, the idea of placing stone statues of gods came to us. We placed the elephant god on the first two floors which were the most frequented targets of pan lovers on an experimental basis," Mohanty said.

"Some employees objected to it saying that the statues could not be placed without regular *puja* (prayers) being held," he said. "Therefore, we made arrangements for prayers by offering flowers and incense stick to the elephant god and it worked wonders. Now nobody spits in those areas," he added.

"Many of the employees have quit the spitting habit. The places that were red have now turned clean," Mohanty said. What is more, officials and visitors passing by often stop and pay their respects to the Ganesh idols before entering the offices, he added.

After nicotine, ethanol and caffeine, the betel nut is the fourth most widely used addictive in the world. It is estimated that at least 20 million people chewed betel nuts in India alone. Over time, the regular use of betel nut stains the mouth, gums and teeth a deep red. But the addicts aren't complaining.

As betel chewing is very popular in Orissa, many offices and authorities in religious places have also taken steps to protect their premises from the ugly red spit stains.

The famous Jagannath temple in Puri, 56 km from here, and a court in Bhubaneswar have banned spitting in their premises. The temple administration has decided to impose a fine of Rs 5 and launch criminal proceedings against violators. It has also decided to place stone statues and *tulsi* (basil, which is revered by Hindus) in spots where people habitually spit. "It is only god who can prevent *paan* chewers from spitting," temple administrator Himanshu Sekhar Samantray said.

The ban "was the only option to maintain a totally clean and hygienic environment," an official of Bhubaneswar court said. The court said chewing betel and spitting within its premises would be considered illegal and any person caught red handed would have to pay a fine and face punishment, lawyer Syamananda Mohapatra said.

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PREDICTING THE FUTURE

The human race has always wanted to control the future, or at least to predict what will happen. That is why astrology is popular. Astrology claims that events on Earth are related to motion of planets across the sky. This is a scientifically tested hypothesis, or would be if astrologers stuck their necks out and made definite predictions that could be tested. However, wisely enough, they make their forecasts so vague that they can apply to any outcome. Statements such as "Personal relations will become intense" or "You will have financially rewarding opportunity" can never be proved wrong. But the real reason most scientists don't believe in astrology is not scientific evidence or lack of it but because it is not consistent with other theories that have been tested by experiment. When Copernicus and Galileo discovered that planets orbit the Sun rather than the Earth, and Newton discovered the laws that govern their motion, astrology became extremely implausible. Why should the positions of other planets against the background sky as seen from the Earth have any correlations with the macromolecules on a minor planet that call themselves intelligent life?

- Stephen Hawking

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Dear R.R.

Please accept my warmhearted complements

It is quite embarrassing for me to press you, the Home Minister of a large state like Maharashtra, to bridle a 'Baba'. I wouldn't do so if I could help it. But the gravity of the situation leaves me with no alternative.

Even the dangerous 'Sandle wood thief' Virappan, these days has to run from place to place to escape from the Karnataka Police vigil, but not this Aslam Baba who is much more dangerous. Stationed in Bagalkot, Karnataka, he is playing havoc with the health of thousands of gullible people of Maharashtra. He is plundering these people in the name of medication, moving around in the broad daylight without being challenged. Virappan and Aslambaba, both, are dangerous but the latter is more so because he shores up his misdeeds with the holy book of Koran.

Aba, this tumult created by the Baba all through out the last year is spreading like wild fire through all the districts of Maharashtra. Thousands of people from Gondia- Gadchiroli to Sindhudurg are racing to Bagalkot. Here Aslam Baba performs serious major operations with his bare fingers, in less than 15 minutes. He removes appendix, kidney stones and malignant growths with great efficiency and ease and then gives these patients some herbal medicines. About 3 to 4 thousand patients gather there every day. Baba treats over a thousand of them, charging Rs. 500 on an average. His daily income thus amounts to five lakhs. Those, who could not be attended, have to stay there in sordid, filthy conditions. Waiting for their turn to come they and their accompanying relatives suffering this hell, fall prey to Baba's great deception. Their maladies are incurable. That renders them helpless and therefore vulnerable. But should this helplessness provide the unscrupulous Babas and Buvas with a permit for illegitimate means of plundering them? Some people say that medical treatment given by doctors is very expensive. Agreed. But for Aslam Baba's treatment too one has to pay through his nose. Should the Maharashtra Government, that ceaselessly reiterates its long rosary of social reformers keep sitting on the fence and watch this exploitation disinterestedly?

Dear Home Minister, two years ago, this pest "Aslam Baba" began to proliferate on the soil of Maharashtra. ANS of Maharashtra halted its spread with all its strength. Aslam Baba had opened his clinic in Solapur. On the behest of the ANS, the police had to intervene and launch a complaint against the Baba. He had to stop his evil work. The then District Surgeon of Solapur had appointed a committee of experts to investigate into this matter. The committee submitted their report to the health department. Respected sir, do obtain that report from the health department and read it carefully. I would like to cite here a few important points from this report for your ready reference. In his testimony Baba himself asserts that he read the Koran when he was just 5 years old; the Vedas at the age of 6 years, the Bible at 7 and by the age of 9 years he read all that was there in the history of mankind. By the grace of Allatala, by the tenth year, he could start treating and operating on the patients. He successfully treats patients suffering from HIV, TB, Blood Cancer, skin diseases and even baldpates. He could operate on the heart, the stomach and also remove stones. He could treat patients possessed by the devil too. Diagnoses of the diseases and their remedies occur to him because of his study of the Koran and the Hadiths. According to these tomes, says the Baba, the total number of illnesses in this world is 3500. Out of these 1000 diseases can be successfully treated by medicines, while a thousand more are cured just by god's grace. One thousand diseases need operations and the remaining 500 are cured automatically. He does not need to anesthetize his patients. All that he needs to do is to wet his fingers with water and thrust his hands into those parts of the patients' bodies that do not function properly. If the valves of the heart are out of order, he pulls them out repairs them and restores them back into their proper places. Whatever injuries occur during this operation heal automatically in 15 minutes. No post-operative care, no antibiotics and no medicines what so ever. All this is Allah's grace! Since the number of patients operated runs into thousands, it is just not possible to maintain any records

Dear honorable Home Minister, what more evidence do you need to initiate criminal proceedings against this Baba? Isn't this admission of the Baba himself enough to ensue legal action? The Baba had accepted to let expert surgeons witness the operations he performs. But when a team of doctors went to his clinic, he could not show a single operation in two long hours after which the team had to leave the Baba and his clinic, as there was no sense in wasting more time. Sir, this same Aslam Baba, whose money making shop described above, we successfully eliminated from Maharashtra, has established a money minting supermarket in Bagalkot now. Once upon a time he was a butcher. Now he uses pieces of animal guts as proofs of having removed rotten parts from the infected organs of his patients. A well-organized gang of muscle men surrounds him. He is the first High Tec Baba who has recorded his miraculous operations on CDs. The tempo and taxi drivers, who bring patients to his operation theatre, are his well looked after agents. He has bought a piece of land measuring 200 acres. He has very few patients from Karnataka because his local support there is very little. The multitudes that throng to his clinic, wasting time, energy money and their own reasoning capacity are the people of Maharashtra. A lot more sensible than these people, as you are sir, we approach you because all our efforts, through out the past year proved futile. We seem to be lacking in something, somewhere. Many news agencies have exposed the shady acts and tricks of this Baba in details with great anxiety and distress but they too proved ineffective. Even the broad casts by the TV channels of the fraudulent activities of this Baba did not make any dint on his trade. If you care to look at any of these, you will come to know as to what extent are our Maharashtrian Brethrens cheated and looted and how their health is put in jeopardy by Aslam Baba. Your own officials can supply you with all the details of this horrible exploitation that goes on without hindrance.

There is one more reason as to why I have to appeal to you. Recently I met with Shri Om Prakash, the chief police superintendent of Belgaum. He thoroughly disappointed me. 'Under which act can I launch a complaint against him?' he asked me. Reiterating the oft-repeated standard argument he told me, that the Baba is supported by very influential Muslim Political Leaders.

Now, Aslam Baba's method of operating is well known. He spreads a white paper on the abdomen of the patient and then commences his operation. Soon the paper is filled with red fluid, which is believed to be blood. But the few obvious questions such as "What is the red color fluid that wets the paper? In case the fluid is blood, is it human or that of an animal? If it is human is it of the same blood group as that of the patient being operated? What do the cells from the piece of the flesh that Baba removes from the patient's body reveal?" that occur to an ordinary mind; do not occur to the super cop. He is not prepared to confront the fraudulent Baba with such questions and demand answers from him to prove his authenticity, or surrender if he cannot do so.

Respectable Mr. R.R.Patil, you do claim to inherit the virtues of benevolence and compassion from Chhatrapati Shivaji. Don't you? If you do, then make full use of the government controlled mass media and stop the multitudes of the gullible Maharashtrians from going to Bagalkot who only get cheated there. The government responsible for people's health does compel the entire population to get inoculated when faced with the outbreak of an epidemic. So it certainly can protect the people from the Baba's sorcery and exploitation. The ANS has launched a complaint of cognizable offence against Aslam Baba two years back. We appeal to you to request the high court judge to speed up the hearing of this case immediately, in public interest. With great expectation we hope to teach a lesson to Aslam Baba through the hearing of this case. We also request you to appeal to the Karnataka Government –Home Ministry to look into the matter. You may also offer to send your own efficient daring police officers in case their officers are unwilling to take action. Please do all that you can to send Aslam Baba to rigorous imprisonment either in Karnataka or in Maharashtra.

If you are unable to do anything then extend a very cordial invitation to him to come back to Maharashtra and appoint him Vice Chancellor of the 'University of Health' in our state. Instead of the highly expensive medical education in colleges and universities, our students can graduate in medical practice from the Aslam Baba University with less fees and little effort. We all know that you are not just a keen observer of the ANS movement. You have played an active role in it. In

Tasgaon, seven years ago, an agitation was initiated against the fraudulent practices of Narendra Maharaj. It was you, who led this agitation. We are convinced that you will be able to stop Aslam Baba's practices too, if you determine to do so. Hence this letter. I am sure you will not disappoint us.

Yours,
Narendra Dabholkar

ANS'S BATTLE BEARS FRUIT

A law to tackle the quacks is in place after a 10-year battle waged by Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (Maharashtra Superstitions Eradication Committee). The State Government has passed the Abolition of superstition Act 2004.

With this act, ANS hopes to crack down on hundreds of individuals and organizations promoting superstitions in the State. An arrest under this act is cognizable and non-bailable and maximum punishment is up to seven years of imprisonment and Rs. 50,000 fine. Under the act, a special vigilance cell will be formed. The officers heading the cell are empowered to register a complaint, investigate the case and confiscate the belongings of the accused.

"This act will come down heavily on the people, who have been making hay all this while in the absence of proper act," said Dr Narendra Dabholkar, state president of ANS, while addressing the media. "The act should have been passed years back. Our success rate of booking the imposters would have been quite a few," he expressed. Deepak Girme, ANS president of Pune chapter was also present.

He cited an example of a Baba near Pune, who was arrested a couple of years ago for the occult practices. Girme hopes that people like these can be arrested. "In absence of a proper act – Drugs and Magic Remedies, Objectionable Advertisement Act 1954 – was used to arrest such person," he recalls. "Now it will be a lot easier," he hopes.

Courtesy: Indian Express

FAITH VERSUS BLIND FAITH

Faith gives us mental strength in ourselves. On the other hand, blind faith (or superstitions) makes us weak. Faith increases our self-confidence and blind faith makes us helpless. Playing on some of these words, some people claim that there is no difference between faith and blind faith. The meaning of faith implies that it is nothing but blind faith. Skimming the surface meaning of these words would convince anyone that this might be the case. The truth is that these wordplays have caused chaos in our society, in peoples' minds; there is a terrible tendency to ignore this fact. A weak society remains a backward and a regressive society. A person belonging to such a society may tend to be depressed or even suicidal; persons would leave everything to fate and not try and improve the depressive situations. Blind faith (or superstitions) then becomes a disease of the mind, a disease of the society. This disease has to be cured. The Government of Maharashtra has decided to fight this disease, by promulgating an anti-superstition law. The draft of this law has been given to the governor, Mr. Mohammad Fazal, for his signature. The state legislature has approved it unanimously; the state governor cannot disapprove or even object to the decision of the legislature. At the most he can revert the draft law to the chief minister for reconsideration. If the cabinet gives it to the governor again, after reconsiderations, the governor will have to sign on the draft thereby making it into law.

Even as these procedures are going on, some religious bodies are staging protests against the anti-superstition law. These religious fanatics are trying to make this an election issue too. In a recent high command meet at Goa, the BJP has skirted the issue of hindutva. This made the extremist factional elements in the BJP a bit uncomfortable. In fact BJP has decided to make

'rashtriyatva' (patriotism) a bye word rather than hindutva. The Sangh Parivar and other similar factions within the BJP have declared a war on anyone who dares to make anti-superstition laws. To avoid any of these needless baits, the state government has decided to put pressure on the governor so that the law is promulgated without any untoward incidences. The Shiv Sena will not be encouraging the Hindu extremist elements, as it is well known that the Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackrey and his father, Prabodhankar Thackrey, were both completely against superstitions and have played a good, supportive role in promoting anti-superstition drives. In fact Prabodhankar Thackrey had even started a statewide drive on superstitious practices. When the BJP-Shiv Sena were in power, the state cultural department had made available to the public, much of the writings of Prabodhankar Thackrey where he had immensely criticized the practice of superstition in our society. Prabodhankar Thackrey was vehemently against the established 'shetji-bhadji' culture and fought it tooth and nail. Actually Prabodhankar Thackrey was named 'Keshav' initially. His name was changed to 'Prabodhankar' because he was so much involved in educating people (prabodhan) for thinking logically about the happenings in the society. Balasaheb Thackrey is himself quite against fake 'godmen' who try and do miracles, black magic and he constantly tries to poke fun at them. In his efforts for promoting pride in being a Maharashtrian he has emphasized that belief in superstitions and being a Maharashtrian, are two totally different things. Balasaheb's drive for Hindu beliefs, similar to Prabodhankar's, does not rely on superstitions as a source of faith. Over and above this, even if you see the Shiv Sena policies in politics, it has kept the VHP-Bajrang Dal extremist Hindu elements, at an arms length. For example, if the VHP calls for a strike (or a bandh) on certain issues, the Shiv Sena never backs them up.

Some self appointed religious groups have made a call for Hindu public awareness campaigns, and have decided to fight and stand against the anti-superstition law. Because of this, there is a widening fissure between the VHP loyalists and the Shiv Sena loyalists. To propagate religion, leaders take help of superstitions. In reality religion and superstitions have nothing in common. These elements are claiming that the anti-superstition law, to be implemented by the state, is anti-religion and a humbug. If you look at it differently, this chaotic atmosphere, deliberately created by these religious groups, is a ripe and fertile ground for fomenting trouble. The fact is that many of our state ministers are by birth and by law, Hindu, and probably are very faithful to their religion too; they even may themselves harbor a few blind faiths in their day-to-day lives. They may be fearful in taking decisions against the Hindu faith; they may dither and may not endorse the anti-superstition law. These lawmakers have to understand the difference between faith and blind faith (superstition). If the society has to make progress in leaps and bounds, it has to rid itself of its weakness, helplessness and its belief in fate – and for this the anti-superstition law is a must. When the anti-superstition law is brought into force in the state, Maharashtra will be the first state in the country to do so; it will be the first to take such a progressive step. The eventful epoch making period that had brought great minds like Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, to be born on the Maharashtrian soil, will be repeated. This period saw immense amount of resistance to the 'shetji-bhadji' culture and the growth of scientific temper and revolution. The great freedom fighter Swatantryaveer Savarkar was a staunch supporter of having a scientific outlook towards life and he campaigned relentlessly to eradicate superstitions, through his writings and speeches.

He coined the word 'hindutva' and his dedication to his religion and his way of life was above board. But in doing so, he was rational too. He did not oppose cow slaughter, not on the basis of religion, but arguing that a cow was an only animal. On what basis are the religious fanatics, who are opposing the anti-superstition law, quoting Savarkar's views on the Hindu religion?

The conditions that made it necessary for the Government of Maharashtra to take the step of enacting the anti-superstition law, requires some thorough understanding. In the past couple of years, due to various superstitious practices, events like sacrifice of human beings, etc have been on the rise. If a woman is childless then she is sent to some quack or a 'godman' who recommends a human sacrifice. Sometimes a 'godman' entices his followers by suggesting that there is secret

treasure hidden somewhere or there will be money raining from the heaven soon, if such and such a thing is done for him. Recently, there has been a case where a family was murdered due to a 'godman' advising his gullible followers incorrectly for obtaining wealth and happiness. In many places it is seen that such incidences have occurred continuously for the last 30 or more years – and sadly instead of lessening these occurrences have increased over the years.

Maharashtra is a state that is most progressive, liberal, educated and cultured in the entire country. It has a network of maximum number of developed cities. All Maharashtrians should be proud about this fact. But unfortunately if one looks at the number of untoward incidences that have occurred here due to superstitions, it is shocking; it is as if we have regressed and are in line with backward states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Many a times it has been claimed that education will automatically eradicate superstition. It is a pity this has not happened. Those Hindu extremists groups that are lodging protests against this law are a pretty educated and literate lot. It is possible that even amongst the educated and literate people, the superstitious beliefs and way of life is on the rise. In the Mumbai –Pune region, where one finds a lot of educated, cultured and sophisticated people, followers of baba-bua-bapu-guru-sadhu-sadhvi are a plenty. This is a very worrying trend. If a city bred person behaves like this, what can we expect from a person living in a village, who may inherently be illiterate and backward? Should not the citybred person be an ideal person or an idol to an uneducated and backward person from a village? The anti-superstition law being enacted by the state government is not against any religion. While tabling this piece of legislation, the government elaborated the reasons for doing the same. The spate of events and the background that led to this was, "Under the cover of (blind) faith (andha-shradhha) people are getting cheated and exploited. This should be stopped. In addition, human sacrifice, animal sacrifice and other cruel acts under the guise of faith, have to be put a halt to. It is because of these facts; the aforesaid legislation is required to be tabled. In the near future, the legislative assembly will be dissolved and therefore there is a need to pass an ordinance so as to enforce the clauses written in the anti-superstition law."

In reality, a state like Maharashtra should have situations that needed such a law, in itself is a shameful matter. The great saints of Maharashtra had opposed many of the superstitious practices and had insisted that their followers should pray and have faith in god but at the same time shun blind faith. Sant Ghadge Maharaj would, in each devotional song, add words that were against superstitions. In the educational campaigns that the Rayat Educational Trust had started in the state, the emphasis on modern science and technology was very much evident. People involved in social upliftment in Maharashtra have time and time again insisted on keeping aside blind faith, old and outdated creeds and customs, etc. In fact the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (RSS) should not be encouraging superstitious beliefs at all. This is because they are supportive of the Indian culture. To practice blind faith and be superstitious in the name of Hindu religion would mean that the RSS is encouraging uncultured, distorted, backward and ugly version of the religion. The pro-superstition lobby, under the banner of 'Hindu Jana Jagruti (or mass awareness) Protest', are actually acting against the intellectual, forward thinking, liberal Hindus. Our ancient religious texts such as Vedas, Upanishads or Bhagvad Gita do not mention anywhere anything about the rituals of human sacrifice, black magic, quack cures. Then on what basis do these people, the self appointed upholders of our religion, trying to misguide the public by saying that the anti-superstition law is against the Hindu religion? Their protests are not because of devotion for their religion, but for the fact that they cannot use religion as a tool for playing politics. This is the main reason why the Governor should take the initiative and support the law. Since the legislature is not in session, the Governor should sign and enforce the ordinance in the state and show his leadership.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar
Courtesy: Lokasatta

THE SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE AND RELIGION

In what follows, some social aspects of religion are considered in so far as they serve to keep India a backward country. The methods of cure suggested are by legislation, education and improved social conditions, with a brief example or two to bring out the basic idea in each case.

Reports by great religious leaders of the past, show that they regarded their own experiences and revelations as the most exhilarating and profound happenings of a lifetime. But the details show that exactly similar and often-identical experiences may be had by the use of certain drugs, electrical stimulus of the brain, lesions of the cerebral cortex and in dreams. The trouble begins when people impose their views, on the basis of such experience, upon others.

My treatment of the phenomenon is purely materialistic, no matter what the source of the revelation. Argument with men or religion on their own ground implies that their sacred books or some other sacred books have a peculiar intrinsic validity, not to be challenged by experiment or reason. I am not prepared to admit that religion cannot be understood or discussed by a man of no faith. This comes to saying that only a confirmed drunkard can be competent to deal with alcoholism. Whenever reform from within succeeded in India, the result was the addition of one more sect to the innumerable existing sects.

The figure of speech about alcoholism has been deliberately introduced. Not only wine but also mescaline and other drugs have formed the core of ancient or primitive modern religion. The potent *soma* of the sacred *Vedas* was a drink of this sort too. Hashish was a reward for and stimulus to the murder of inconvenient opponents, as used by a fanatical Muslim sect of the Middle Ages in Asia Minor. The drug and its use gave rise to the word assassin. The sect itself changed into the more innocuous one of the Aga Khan. Religions have recognized kinship and rivalry between the spiritual and the spirituous. Thus Buddhism and Islam banned wine. If such a ban can now be defended on grounds of social necessity and prohibition be made part of a democratic constitution, why should other hallucinogens not be treated on the same basis? And what more powerful hallucinogen than religion?

There is one difference that drugs can generally be relied upon to produce exaltation. Its purveyors are taxed and subject to regulation, while the individual who uses them has to observe public decorum and, is severely punished for breaking law and order. Curative treatment is given to addicts. We have been very slow and hesitant in dealing with the purveyors of religion on the same basis. Only the most gruesome malpractices have been banned: sati (widow burning; defended as 'voluntary' by many pundits), hook swinging, and the most obscene features of the *holi* festival are now forbidden. The last comes directly from prehistory; even Asoka had trouble with the institution. But we have stopped halfway. Pilgrim taxes are levied by many places whether the visitor is a pilgrim or not. Why not tax all income from any religious source, including the 'voluntary' contributions from the pious? Why are temples and mosques not taxed on the same basis as many buildings reserved for the use of a special group? Marriage and divorce are now regulated to some extent by civil procedure; monogamy has become a legislative measure, regardless of religion. Why not secularize these social institutions completely and compulsorily?

Some people, although willing to admit that Indian religion has its harmful aspects, insist that education is the sole remedy. It is not, of course, but there is every advantage in educating people out of their superstition. That is one way of improving Indian education and social conditions, provided education is understood in a sense far wider than that of the schoolroom. The crudest of Indian superstitions is faith in astrology. Millions still bathe at a solar eclipse, not as a hygienic measure but to free the sun from a demon of darkness.

It is known, however, that there is no longer a risk of perpetual darkness if the ritual bath be omitted. The precise time and duration of the eclipse is predictable long in advance, not by the Brahmin's stock in trade but by Newtonian theories of the universe. It is not enough to make this fact public, namely that the Indian almanacs surreptitiously borrow their information about eclipses from foreign sources, while retaining the tripe about planetary influences upon horoscopes.

The *panchang* almanacs sell by the hundred thousands all over the country, each area having one or more of its own. Their very existence must be turned to good use by inserting useful information: first aid hygiene, element of legal rights for the citizen, possibilities of getting aid from sources other than the blood-sucking money lenders in time of need and so on. Let the planets stay, and give their positions by all means; but make the traditional almanac into a really useful educational document.

Here the modern educator is definitely at fault. He works through a bureaucratic mechanism originally imposed by a foreign government and allowed to continue by inertia. His own education has, more often than not, consisted in learning foreign books by rote where his grandfather might have recited Sanskrit texts with as little understanding. Often, he can teach the latest scientific theories in school and maintain outside the classroom that his ancestors three thousand years ago could fly through the air by the power of yoga and see the atomic nucleus and viruses by their inner sight. He never turns scientific methods upon the study of superstition. Why did the superstition arise? Did the Indian almanac ever perform any useful function at all? If not, how can one account for its rise and spread?

The basic fact is that the whole of Indian agriculture turns upon the monsoon. The annual rains begin at about the same time every year in any given part of the country, but the land has to be prepared for the sowing well before then. Similarly, the harvest has to be taken in after the last normal rain has fallen. But the calendar is a very advanced scientific concept in primitive life, determined mainly by long observation of the positions of the sun, moon and planets. We know that these heavenly bodies merely mark time: for primitive man, they made the weather as the very word meteorology indicates. So, they also seemed to control man's destiny. These all-powerful stars would have to be propitiated according to the priest's instructions.

To counteract this, education is the best method. Just as eclipses can be predicted, the onset and strength of the monsoon can also be predicted. Not as accurately as astronomical phenomena, but much better than the *varsha-phala* ('yield of the rains') given in every Indian almanac. It is easier to send out storm warnings by radio and much quicker too. With radios in every key village, the farmer could be advised - *given an efficient weather bureau* - when to sow and to harvest. But this means leaving the *panchang* almanac alone. If we do this, superstition will survive much longer, and may be perverted to strange uses by some interested people.

The best way is to have a reasonably efficient long-range weather forecasting system. This is now well within our reach with air-mass analysis and observation satellites. The information must then be put into every almanac and the basis of calculation carefully explained in simple language. The peasant will see for himself that the stars have nothing to do with the weather or the monsoon and will be willing to listen when other bits of really useful scientific information are given. Even now he knows that fertility rites are much less effective than the proper use of fertilizer. But we must not throw away the magnificent chance of utilizing an old institution like the almanac to cut down the very superstition it promotes.

The last section says in effect that *tout comprendre* is by no means equivalent to *tout pardonner*. Let us try the method on the most obscurantists of all Indian religious and social institutions, caste. The evils of the caste system are known, but no one asks himself why the system originated and why it has held on in spite of so great a change in Indian life. Why should the Brahmin's pretensions be believed when he puts his sons to work in an office, which uses only English, not Sanskrit, and is perhaps headed by a beef-eating sahib?

The answer is quite obvious. Caste was socially useful at one time, when production was at a much lower level. It was the one way of keeping people together in co-operative effort rather than have every man strike out for himself with the common ruin of all. The village was the firm basis of caste, because a kinship group generally held land. Tenure of land and membership of the group went together. Whoever was outcast could no longer survive in the village. With feudal tenure, caste was still powerful as a common bond against unlimited oppression. Whole villages would desert en masse if the baron bore down too hard. Their caste-fellows were bound to help these peasant strikers in

distress. Further, the village need for a potter, blacksmith, carpenter or barber was fulfilled by artisan castes when the level of commodity production was low.

Today, factory production, overcrowded cities, road and rail transport have changed all this. Caste persists only because some people gain from it, namely, those who possess land, hold the priesthood, and so on. Caste disabilities persist in spite of legislation and - in many places - mass conversion as to Buddhism. The root cause is the abysmally low economic status of the lowest castes and their total lack of opportunity. Neither legislation, nor conversion, nor schoolroom education can remove this. The sole possible cure is more efficient production and distribution of the product in a manner equitable for all; most people call this socialism. But equality on paper and the adult franchise will not be enough, when politicians can use caste for vote catching and distribution of patronage.

To take an allied but smaller point: most economists see no future for India without birth control. The national income and production are not rising at a faster rate than the population, so that the net gain is virtually nil. But why do people want children in a poor country? The usual answer is, 'superstition'. A son is essential so that the parents may go to heaven and be given the annual oblation to keep them there.

Silly as this is, it contains an ancient historical truth. Archaeology tells us that it was a tremendous and extremely rare achievement in the older Stone Age for any human being to reach the age of forty years. Food production instead of food gathering made it possible for a substantial number of people to live longer. This only meant that some people lived to an age where they could no longer fend for themselves and had to be fed by others as in childhood. The offering to the manes (*pinda*) is simply an extension of this practice, when the ancestors have entered upon the long sleep of the grave.

If, now, birth control were by some miracle enforced, it would mean that every person who reached a certain age and physical condition would have no one to feed him in the present social set up. Children are necessary precisely because Indian parents have no other means of subsistence in old age. Insurance, savings, landed property, pensions or other means of income would not suffice, at a guess, for as much as five per cent of the population. So, the birth control expert is in fact asking people to starve to death in old age so that some other people will be better off.

Most of us are not likely to listen to the argument. Where food was very scarce, e.g., in Rajasthan until the last century, a dreadful form of population control was affected by female infanticide.

Today, population control will be successful only if people are convinced that there would be enough for them to live on in their old age even if they have no children.

The real stupidity lies with the 'planners' who try to regulate the total numbers of the people by theory, without assurance of a reasonable livelihood for the people in existence. The expert who talks of epidemic and famine as natural checks upon the 'population explosion' himself runs to consult the doctor the moment he has a fever; and never goes without a full meal if he can help it. There are modern superstitions in the guise of science, quite as deadly as those of religion.

The need is less for reform or even the abolition of religious superstition than for basic changes, which can only be described as revolutionary. Unfortunately it is possible to have a revolution without its promised benefits, but never the benefits without a revolution.

DD Kosambi

RISK MANAGEMENT AND RELIGION

Risk management has become a fashionable phrase in the business world these days. All successful businessmen and women will tell you that if you have to do business, there are always risks. Proper identification and calculation of risk will enable business to succeed. All pioneers and explorers will also tell you the same. To go places where no one has gone, to trail a blaze, some amount of risk is a must.

But what do the modern spiritual gurus tell you? To be calm and cool, to take things as they come! Suffering is because of previous life - do good now so that your after life will be better. These days

there is a surfeit of TV channels preaching religion. Surf a few of these TV channels and see what each of the guru is preaching to innocent, gullible audience. It is pathetic. The crowd is being lulled into becoming nincompoops. The spiritual gurus will tell the people that they are in the right path and will go to heaven; rest of the people who are not following their instructions are wayward and will have no peace. These gurus are making people brain dead. People get into a stupor of inaction. The phrases '*chaltai hai*', '*jo hoga so hoga*', are extension of this state of mind - these have become a bane for the right progress of our society.

This is a dangerous trend. The numbers of *vipassana* clubs, *swadhyaya* groups that are springing up here and there, are amazing. The growth in materialism, the increase in disposable incomes of the inflating middle class, has left many people confused and aimless. They are seeking a purpose in their lives by approaching gurus who can teach them the 'art' of living. They seek solace in religion for a direction - but in reality they are direction less, not doing anything, wasting time. They are paying to be members of the *vipassana* clubs, *swadhyaya* groups, etc. so that the responsibility of improving their lot is on someone else. They themselves do not want to do anything constructive or even take any decisions!!

This malaise is seen in all walks of our lives in the country. In such a large country, why don't we have many world-class sports men and women, world class scientists and doctors, world class explorers and business men, or even management gurus? If a person is very religious, pious and philosophical, it will not give him or her a chance to take risks. Taking risks mean stretching a little far, then a little more, and more.....

Taking risky decisions means trying out things that no one has done before, there is no guru to tell you that you are in the right path, you cannot turn to anyone to lean on, you are completely on your own. And that's the fun of taking risks. When you succeed the exhilaration is yours; the high is yours. There is that extra zing in your footsteps, a new enthusiasm for life. Proper understanding of risk and its management produces real, solid leaders. In my opinion following a guru makes a person submissive, passive and essentially a non-functioning, nincompoop.

Anuradha Bhagawat

BEYOND BLIND BELIEF
www.antisuperstition.com

Witchcraft, women wedded to the gods, marked by the evil eye, stars that affect earthly actions – these are just some superstitious phenomena that inspire fear and unfortunately also, faith.

To counteract the spread of superstition, the Andhashraddha Nirmolan Samiti (ANS) an organization promoting rational and scientific temper has launched www.antisuperstition.com a site dedicated to their cause.

“Superstitions go beyond just ghosts and goblins. Under its broad head come misconceptions like that of caste system, blind belief in astrology or beliefs such as the full moon directly affecting human behaviour, the secondary position that women are often relegated to, among others” says Deepak Girme of ANS. The site addresses these blind beliefs as well.

Comprehensive and user friendly in approach, the site contains information about the organization, activities, campaigns and its outreach programmes including newsletters.

The site details awareness and action campaigns against superstitious beliefs in Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. Among them are an anti-ghost campaigns in five districts of Konkan region, awareness and counseling campaign against Bhanamati, a culture bound syndrome restricted mainly to the Marathwada region and a campaign against animal sacrifice in village fairs.

“As citizen of a modern world we should start looking positively towards shedding misconceptions and taking on modern values graduating to a superstition-free world” says Girme. Superstitious beliefs are all pervasive and to counter them, the ANS has devised a broad range of projects

targeted at specific audiences, says the site. A project to promote scientific temperament presided over by Dr Vasant Gowarikar, former scientific adviser to the prime minister has formulated syllabus for primary and high school students on various aspects of superstition. In the past six years this has imparted training through 500 centers to 10000 teachers and 150000 students appeared for the examination. Symposiums and seminars on topics like education and superstition, women and superstition, social reformers of Maharashtra, as well as workshops and study camps to train new activists, are part of ANS activities.

The ANS also promotes social change through measures such as simple marriage ceremony suggested by social reformer Mahatma Jotiba Phule “without a priest, inauspicious time or meaningless rituals”

Besides a series of monographs and booklets on topics like scientific attitude, debunking of astrology, hypnosis and Vaastu Shastra, the ANS also comes out with monthly magazine ANS Vartapatra in Marathi and English quarterly Thought and Action. (The contents of Thought and Action are now available on site.)

Also on its calendar of activities are public debates by Narendra Dabholkar who heads the ANS movement, mobile science cum book exhibitions, an exhibition of books, providing funds for purchase of costly books like encyclopedia and foreign journals of our interest, health related lecture-demonstrations on subjects like mental disorder, women specific health problems, child-care, adolescence, sex education, de-addiction mission, miracle demonstrations to explain the scientific theory and trickery behind miracles performed by God men. The site asks for participation from interested activists in carrying out these activities too. In tune with its cause of debunking superstition, Images of dancing skeletons, ghosts and ghouls accompany the text. Also e-mail the ANS at info@antisuperstition.com.

Aishwarya Mavinkurve
Courtesy: Indian Express

POLITICS WITHOUT POLITICAL PARTIES **Radical Democracy Enunciated by M.N.Roy**

It is difficult to separate politics from political parties for the politicians, that is, but not for the Radical Humanists. They have a different philosophy and a different aim with no axe to grind. M.N.Roy who enunciated the philosophy of Radical Humanism, in India, has highlighted its main features thus: On the one hand it rejects any kind of belief in soul, god miracle, immortality transcendence or prophets and Avatars and the consequent prayers, Poojas, idol worships, rituals and fasts for appeasement of gods and spirits. On the other hand it also rejects all forms of exploitation and injustice, authoritarianism and concentration of power, converting human beings into means and objects, chauvinism, collectivism, and suppression, of free inquiry and expression. On the positive side it believes that the human being is not created by any god but has evolved through a long process of evolution. This process has endowed him with unique potentialities to invent languages, ideas and tools to transform his environment and to some extent even to control it: to develop laws and institutions to shape himself and also the history of the species and above all has endowed him with self-consciousness that obliges him to be moral. The urge to freedom and the search for truth are basic features of the human species that form the main spring of his growth and development.

M.N.Roy arrived at this philosophy through a long journey. Starting with armed insurrection against the British, he sought German arms through Philippines, Japan Korea, China and the United States, and finally he landed in Mexico. Here he became a Marxist. Next he went to Moscow. There he was recognized as an outstanding theorist-organizer of the Communist International and founded the ‘émigré’ Communist Party of India in Tashkent. He also took a leading part in the revolutionary movement of China. He broke with the Comintern because it considered the Socialists and Social Democrats to be the greater enemies than the Fascists and the Nazis. On his

clandestine return to India, he was arrested and put in solitary confinement for six years. Because of Marxism, Roy was liberated from the influences of both religion and (ultra) nationalism. On being released from the prison, he joined the Indian National Congress but opposed Gandhi's revivalist-populist combination of religion and politics, his spiritualist obscurantism and asceticism, his compromises with landlords and big business, his hostility to science and technology, as well as his tendency to call off mass-movements at critical moments in the name of non-violence. Thus the basic ideas of Radical Humanism have emerged out of all this experience with political parties and their ideologies. A Radical Alternative to Gandhian leadership meant enlightenment of the masses (not just arousing them) and building effective organizations at the grass roots to achieve political independence strengthened by economic emancipation and social justice. To achieve this aim the Humanists formed the Radical Democratic Party (RDP.)

But this was a party with difference both in spirit and letter. Instead of a code of conduct enforced with a whip, RDP has organizational ethics accepted voluntarily by its ranks. It could never claim a huge mass-membership held together by some mechanical apparatus like the various Senas operating in the prevailing atmosphere of ignorance and cultural backwardness. It was instead, a small group, which did not discard its intellectual integrity and moral and spiritual strength. There was wave after wave of religious chauvinist and nationalist mass hysteria in our country. Many a political party exploited that atmosphere for capturing power. The RDP alone stood firm reminding people that so long as politics remained rooted in emotion and prejudice and at times even hatred, it cannot bring them, real freedom. Since their aim had never been capturing power, the RSP could afford to go against the popular current. For them intellectual and moral integrity counted far more than immediate and temporary success. Having placed themselves outside the scramble for power they eschewed use of false promises money, bribes, emotional appeals like appeals to cultural racial heritage and chauvinist sensitivities, as also the use of muscle.

They soon realized that party politics however clean and moral, could not be democratic politics in the true sense of the term, since any party by its very nature is bound to be exclusive and monopolized by professional politicians pushing the 'demos' out of democracy. Struggling to expand beyond the limits of such closed groups, the RDP wanted to build a political apparatus in which power could be effectively vested in the people without any intermediaries between them and the state. This view of the Radical Humanists is not anarchist. Neither are they enamored of the Marxists' utopia of a stateless society, nor do they shun politics as a dirty game. Politics for them should be the theory and practice of public administration and the state a political organization of the society as a whole and not the administration by a political party that is invariably a tiny fraction of the society. Whether the party in power is nationalist, secular, socialist or any other hue is immaterial. This stance implies the responsibility of doing whatever is necessary to guarantee orderly, equitable and just administration of public affairs. The present political party simply is worthless and incapable of initiating other forms of public activities, which would raise politics to a higher level. A true democracy can be attained only when all citizens play an active and significant role in the 'state'. For this people should also be able to nominate their own candidate and not just choose from among the candidates put up by political parties. The changeover from party politics to democratic politics can be brought about gradually by raising the intellectual level of people by sharpening their sense of self-respect and self-reliance and their rights and responsibilities.

This means that true Democracy is not possible unless the masses are emancipated. No political party is motivated to do this. Sensing that in order to achieve this aim, no purpose is served by being organized as a political party the RDP was dissolved in 1948. It was transformed into a broad and comprehensive social movement for the spread of education for democracy and the promotion of the ideal of freedom. It became the school for the education of people to develop into better human beings and never as a collectivity demanding sacrifice of their individuality.

Now the question that arises is 'what is to be done in the meanwhile?' In the meanwhile the Radical Humanists have not remained aloof from politics. They co-operate with the like-minded opposition parties during elections. Election campaigns are utilized for educating people, advising and helping

them to examine political promises to vote intellectually, to make them realize that they are not obliged to vote for some party or the other but can vote instead for a locally nominated candidate who is their own man. The humanists actively participate in the current politics without engaging in the scramble for power, engaging instead in building a new political structure from below. They co-operate with the NGOs and fight against injustice to uphold human rights. They seek to cultivate cosmopolitanism and appreciation of cultural diversities; freedom and mutual co-operation; creativity and sense of responsibility and a morality based on rationality. They advocate decentralization of power and are committed to reducing the gap between the rich and the poor countries and the gap between the rich and poor of every country. All this would seem to have a very strong utopian element. But this is certainly desirable on rational and moral grounds. Radical Humanists do have a plan of action to march towards this goal.

What Roy desired was that political parties be replaced by a network of people's committees at the grass roots level; that these committees be vested with great deal of political power; that such power that may have to be exercised at higher centers be in the hands of persons elected as representatives of these committees; these representatives themselves being answerable to the people's committees who would have the authority to recall them if necessary. This positive part of Roy's theory failed to emerge on the political scene. However there are some positive aspects in the present situation in India. The Indian Judiciary, these days seems to be playing a positive role by imposing restraint on legislative and particularly executive excesses. The press too plays a part in checking executive arbitrariness and in exposing corruption in high places. A fairly strong civil liberties and human rights movement has emerged in recent Indian politics. And of much more significance are the grass root organizations working amongst the deprived sections of the society for amelioration of the conditions of their lives. All these institutions and organizations have nothing to do with any political party.

Roy with his associates had elaborated a scheme of 'Organized Democracy' in People's plans I and II, developed on the basis of certain understanding and recognition; firstly that it is a more deeper and more comprehensive problem than one of institutional adjustments; secondly it can be solved only by comprehensive social movement developed on the basis of realizing the ultimate identity of political economic and moral problems and thirdly it should be inspired by a philosophy capable of suggesting solutions to all these problems. The people's committees mentioned in the plans that were expected to form the base of the democratic structure can be compared with the Panchayat Scheme prepared by Balwantraji Mehta committee in 1950 and implemented in some states like Maharashtra and Gujarat. This experiment was not very successful because it was implemented without creating the psychological and cultural background, which according to the Royists is the very basis of Organized Democracy.

According to recent amendment to this scheme, every state must form Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels. They will have the power of self-government and a few additional powers in other fields that include agriculture, land improvement, animal husbandry, fisheries, small-scale industries, etc., as also poverty elimination and health care. The governor of every state should appoint a finance commission to review their financial position and provide funds. As every body knows, all these Panchayats are captured by this or that political party or are run by the 'Bahubalis'. This institutional structure has been built without the foundation of the cultural and psychological background as said earlier.

This foundation can be and has to be laid not by any political parties that believe that nothing can be done without being in power. But by Radical Humanists and NGOs that believe in the Humanist Philosophy of building good human beings. They can convert the present conservative Panchayat bodies into genuinely democratic people's committees. For this Humanist Democratic values will have to be inculcated amongst the village population through meaningful and creative programmes till in the course of time a local leadership of Humanist Workers arises. These workers then will increasingly get elected to local Panchayats, that can then demand that they should have the right of setting up their own candidates for election to state legislature and Lok Sabha, and also the right to recall these representatives if found wanting. Additionally the Panchayats may also play their

legitimate part in planning at the micro and the macro levels to avoid backlogs in development at various levels. The present Panchayats if transformed into People's committees as envisaged by Roy will establish Radical Democracy in this country. Politics then will be liberated from the political parties.

Suman Oak

DEGREE IN ASTROLOGY GENERATING HEAT

University Grants Commission (UGC), under the Government of India's Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), is responsible for functioning, funding (and accrediting) all the educational courses that are imparted in the country. If an institution is not accredited or recognized by the UGC, its degrees are not valid and people seeking these degrees probably will not have any value in the job market. After all why do students study - to obtain jobs or to progress in their career paths, isn't it? Therefore, all institutions try and get their educational courses accredited and recognized by the UGC.

In February 2001, the UGC created a huge furor in the education community by announcing courses in astrology. It sent out circulars to all universities (approximately 250 of them) entitled 'Guidelines for Setting up Departments of Vedic Astrology in Universities Under the Purview of University Grants Commission'. The letter first discusses the scope for such studies - 'Beneficiaries of these courses would be students, teachers, professionals from modern streams like doctors, architects, marketing, financial, economic and political analysts, etc.'

The circular mentions that the course duration would be three years for graduate level, two years for post graduation level; and surprise of surprises - there are short duration one-year diplomas and long-term research provisions as well. Under course contents, the circular says that the 'Syllabus for the course will be made available by the UGC'. The fee structure prescribed is three thousand per year for the graduate course and four thousand per year for the postgraduate course. Besides this, there are provisions to appoint faculty, buy books for library, computer laboratory, horoscope bank and an observatory. The circular further advises that 'Universities may go for academic collaboration with faculties of oriental studies and *Sanskrit Vidyapeeth* for these courses'.

But in such a detailed circular UGC failed to mention what sort of degree would the students would obtain - bachelor/master of science? Apparently the UGC and the MHRD has recognized Astrology as a subject of **science** in different universities and decided to give proper education in different branches of Astrology so as to avoid damage to this traditional science from practicing quacks! The UGC claims, "there is an urgent need to rejuvenate the science of Vedic Astrology in India, to allow this scientific knowledge to reach to the society at large and to provide opportunities to get this important science even exported to the world."

The uproar it caused in the academic corridors was unbelievable. To many sane and rational minded Indians, this was completely against the Indian Constitution, which encourages scientific temper. In the Fundamental Duties (Article 51 A, clause VIII), the Indian Constitution says that 'it shall be the duty of every citizen of India - to develop the scientific temper and spirit of inquiry'. Noted India astrophysicist, Prof. J.V. Narlikar lamented that "the elevation of astrology to that of a subject taught in the universities would take India backwards towards medieval times".

In connection with this, Dr. Pushpa Mittra Bhargava, founder director of the Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, lodged a writ petition in the Andhra Pradesh high court. Dr Bhargava argued that introduction of astrology, as an officially Government funded educational course would be illegal and unconstitutional. He commented: "Astrology has never been regarded and could never be regarded as a science. Under article 51 of the constitution one of the fundamental duties of the citizen was to develop a scientific temper. The action of the UGC, far from creating a scientific temper, would on the contrary strengthen superstition. The tax payers' money should not be used for such purposes when India does not have sufficient funds even for

such basic human necessities as safe drinking water, basic sanitation, basic health, elementary education, roads, etc.”

In August 2001, the Andhra Pradesh High Court rejected this writ petition. It did not address the main question raised in the petition - which a degree course in Astrology or Jyotish Shashtra would be against the spirit of the constitution. The presiding judge argued that as no final decision had been made, he could not interfere in the UGC's decision-making processes, and leave the issue to the UGC expert committee. The judge also referred to a 19th century edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (2nd edition) where astrology is termed as science! The judge really missed an opportunity to spur the entire nation in the direction of scientific thinking, instead of living in the Vedic times. It's a pity.

Who belonged to the expert committee advising the MHRD and the UGC to start such a hair brained degree courses? As long as these names are not public, it is likely that the committee consisted of persons made up entirely of MHRD lackeys, pro-astrology yes men, and no representatives of scientists, or people from the Indian science academies and associations.

After this defeat, Dr. P.M. Bhargava knocked the doors of the Supreme Court of India to urgently shake the UGC out of its rash and irresponsible step. However, on May 5, 2004 a further setback was delivered to the Indian scientific thinkers. The Chief Justice of India, Justice S Rajendra Babu, dismissed Dr. Bhargava's petition and upheld the UGC's decision to introduce the 'Vedic Astrology' (Jyotir Vigyan) courses in India. The ruling claimed the astrology is a part of ancient Indian tradition and it could be taught.

The person, who intervened on behalf of UGC, was one Dr. Raj Baldev, a self-proclaimed Cosmo theorist (what is this supposed to be?). He is supposed to be an international figure with ability of predicting events of the universe as well as their influence on living and nonliving entities. If you read what Dr. Raj Baldev has to say, its mind-boggling madness - how can his words be referred to the UGC - an educational body? Dr. Baldev refers to Sun, Moon, planets, mathematics and what not. He has laid claims to the fact that he correctly predicted fall of three governments, etc. In a country that has a scientist as the country's first citizen, all that is happening in the corridors of UGC is certainly incredulous.

To me astrology is no different from occult - a complete hocus focus. Science and astrology cannot be mentioned in the same breath!. The teaching of astrology would be nothing but waste of time, energy and money of public exchequer. It will cause confusion in the scientific temperament of our future generation. The path taken by UGC is absolutely reckless. Vedic astrology in the times of the Vedas, five thousand years ago, may have been okay - but human civilization has moved on and we cannot keep on harping on the past. Jyotir Vigyan was a part of our ancient culture - but so were so many things practiced in the society. Take for example our way of life or the status of women. Is it the same today as it was five thousand years ago? Definitely not. Haven't we discarded many mores and customs of the old in this modern day?

After this black day for Indian science, the Times of India commented, "It's a sad reflection on the frailty of the human condition that people still believe in the power of divination and foretelling. Because, shorn of all its arcane mumbo-jumbo, astrology is no more than flying a kite into the future. Its tenets are disarmingly simple, though: A person's character and destiny can be understood from the positions and patterns of the solar system, including the Sun, Moon, and planets, in the zodiac at the moment of birth. Interpreting the location of these bodies using a chart called horoscope, astrologers then claim to predict and explain the course of life and help people, companies and nations with decisions of great import. Ridiculous as such claims may sound to anyone who knows how far the Sun, Moon, and planets really are, millions of people around the world base crucial medical, professional, and personal decisions on advice received from astrologers, astrological publications and zodiac signs.

There are at least three glaring inconsistencies in this system. First, the arbitrary grouping of stars, called constellations, has changed drastically due to the gradual movement of the Earth's poles since the Babylonians first outlined them 4,000 years ago. The sign Aries now almost corresponds with the constellations Pisces. Second, the influence of the ascending planet at birth obviously

cannot be comprehensive since the outer planets, Neptune and Pluto, were only discovered in 1846 and 1930, respectively. Third, how does one estimate the exact time of birth, considering that the gap between the moment the head meets the pelvic floor and the emergence of the last limb is about two hours?

At any rate why should the moment of birth, rather than conception, be so crucial?

BOY BEHEADED ON BABA BENGALI'S ADVICE

Subhash Soni spoke, his eyes moistened and he began to choke on his words. Standing in front of him, handcuffed, was the man who had murdered his son Rahul in a bizarre human sacrifice ritual. "I have come here only to ensure he will be put behind bars so that this does not happen to another child," said Soni as the 33-year-old killer, Anil Singh alias Master, looked at him, his eyes remorseless the expression inscrutable.

According to officers at Manpada police station in Dombivali, Singh had no previous enmity with Soni. He committed the act on the mere advise of a black magician named Baba Rajak Malik who operates from Bandra has also been arrested for instigating Singh to commit the crime.

"Three years ago I had a very troubled family life. There used to be fights in the house everyday. I was advised by a person to visit Baba Bengali in Bandra. Despite the visits, there was no change in my family life, but I began to blindly trust his words," Singh admitted today. Three years ago, Singh, after several visits, was advised by the Baba to beat up his wife. He was assured by the Baba that his wife would not die even if he beat her up mercilessly. Acting on the Baba's advice, he assaulted his wife with a chopper. "As Singh's family stayed in Manpada, his wife lodged a complaint at our police station and he was subsequently arrested in March 2000. He was then convicted for 22 months." Said senior inspector Samsher Khan Pathan.

On his release a month ago, Singh made a futile attempt to reconcile with his family. Disappointed, he went back to the Baba in Bandra. "This time, Baba said I was facing problems as I had done an incomplete job in assaulting my wife and now only a human sacrifice could help me," Singh said. Malik admits that he had advised him to make a sacrifice, but counters that he had not specified a human sacrifice, "When I told him to make a sacrifice I meant a hen or a goat. It is not my fault if he misunderstood me," Malik argued. It was on June 7 that Soni's elder son Rahul disappeared from Ambarnath. Two days later, the police found the headless body of the nine-year-old boy in the jungles of Buwapada on the hills of Ambarnath. A day later, Rahul's head was found in the same area by his parents. Though the Ambarnath police suspected that the boy could have been a victim of superstition, no arrests were made.

Recalling the crime in a tone devoid of any emotion, Singh today said, "On that day I saw this neighborhood boy and asked him to join me for a walk. We went to the jungle on the hills of Ambarnath. After I made sure no one was around, I told the boy we would do a small ritual. He agreed. After engaging in some fake ritual, I told him he was possessed and in order to exorcise the ghosts he had to lie down with his eyes shut. He consented. I then slit his throat and severed his head from the body."

By this time, the Soni family had begun inquiring in the neighborhood for their missing son, who was last seen at a nearby saloon. Inspector Pathan said since the crime was heinous, both Singh and the Baba may face life imprisonment.

Even as the Mumbai police are battling with legal hassles in curbing Bengali babas, the self styled tantriks, after the sensational human sacrifice cases in Thane, ANS has been demanding that the State Assembly pass a private bill that seeks enactment of an anti-superstition law. There is a pressing need for a law to ban at least 52 superstitious practices like black magic, use of holy ash, talisman, stones extorting evil spirits, dispensing of magical remedies for curing ailments, claims of rituals assuring male progeny. The law would ensure police action against godmen and tantriks who are involved in and support the anti-superstition movement

OH, THE WONDER OF HUMAN MIND!

Since time immemorial, nothing seems to intrigue the human mind more than the unknown or the unsaid. It has been said that fear is that dark room where negatives are developed. And thus, man toils to delve into that realm of the world over which it has no control – the future. Oh, how fragile is the human mind!

First come the stars. The mysticism of these seemingly innocuous little shining wonders has been immortalized in the lines of a child's rhyme "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are?" Soon we are told that the stars hold our destiny, and thus we revere those shiny white dots that hold us tantamount to slaves.

Fail an exam and your Jupiter is to blame. Appease him, say the wise ones, or else face the wrath! A fever that persists even after the parasetamol doses. "That's Saturn up to its tricks. Nothing to worry" says the ancient texts, there is always way out. Prayers, meditation, flattery, and if all fails, there's bribery with rubies, amethysts and emeralds. It is good a thing that man has found the formula to hoodwink these errant planets. Oh, how brilliant is the human mind!

In the end ruby still sparkles but the business is long last, the gold is lighter but the pitter patter of tiny feet still do not ring the house. The wise man is gone, snatched ahead of time by the cruel hands of death (perhaps the rubies and diamonds had no appeal to the God of death) and finally, the saying rings in his ears and in his human mind, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us"

FRIDAY THE 13TH MAN IS INSECURE AND TURNS TO SUPERSTITIONS FOR JUSTIFICATIONS

Is Friday the 13th inauspicious?

Let us get this straight. No day is either auspicious or inauspicious. Friday the 13th is like any other normal day. The belief, that it is inauspicious or the day of the haunted is just figment of an illiterate mind's imagination. In fact believing this hogwash today is defeating the whole purpose of modern education.

How do these superstitions breed?

Human beings are forever looking for answers. When any occurrence is beyond their understanding, they attribute it to the supernatural. Also, our education does not possess a scientific temperament. Therefore man is insecure and turns to superstitions for justifications.

What makes you so sure that superstitions hold no truth?

Every occurrence that takes place has a scientific explanation. The so-called miracles that we hear about are all scientific tricks used to fool gullible minds. Our organization in fact has issued a challenge to any individual who can prove a miracle or extraordinary occurrence. We will give such individual 11 lakh in cash. But he has to prove the fact.

Are Indians the only superstitious lot?

Not at all. In fact Friday the 13th is in itself a Western concept. This is a borrowed superstition made popular by movies. The human mind is frail and superstitions proliferate globally.

Can superstitions be obliterated from people's minds?

Sure. Firstly, we must encourage scientific temperament in our education. Next the media must take on a positive educative role instead of sensationalizing such baseless notions. And finally, influential socio-political leaders should exert their power to abolish these notions instead of fuelling them further.

Shumita Mahajan
Courtesy: Times Of India